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**THE  
POLITICAL THOUGHT OF TAGORE**

**BY**  
**DR. SACHIN SEN M.A., Ph.D.**  
*Editor, The Indian Nation, Patna*

**GENERAL PRINTERS & PUBLISHERS LTD.**  
**119, BHARAMTALA STREET, CALCUTTA**

**Publisher: Sures C. Das, M.A.,  
General Printers & Publishers Ltd.  
119, Dharamtala Street, Calcutta.**

*First Published March 1947*

*Price Rs. 10.*

**PRINTED BY SURES C. DAS, M.A.,  
ON BEHALF OF GENERAL PRINTERS &  
PUBLISHERS LTD. AT THEIR WORKS ABINAS  
PRESS—119, DHARAMTALA ST., CALCUTTA.**



To  
THOSE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN  
Who Strive for Peace on Earth  
And Good-will Among Mankind



## PREFACE

It should be our aspiration to live in harmony and peace amidst differences. But to-day science, politics, commerce, all are prostituted through man's greed. Man has the knowledge, the power, to build society on the basis of peace and justice. But there is evidently not the necessary will. All this heightens the need for the discovery of a new outlook, which can curb man's lust for power and put out the blaze of hatred and misery. Man, to be worthy of his name, must justify himself through social service with love and sympathy. In this modern age, quick with shaking changes, we often find ourselves lost and our national existence smudged. Tagore is extremely helpful in finding out the meaning of life and the *raison d'être* of national existence. Unfortunately he is more talked of, less known and understood. I, therefore, feel that in presenting a faithful account of Tagore's political thought, no apology is needed. Moreover, the harassed world and resurgent India look for guidance and leadership. The West is torn by power politics; the East is in the turmoil of transition and change. Tagore can definitely place them on the right track.

During my post-graduate days I prepared a treatise under the title, *The Political Philosophy of Rabindranath*. It was published in 1929 with Foreword by Mr. Pramatha Chaudhuri, M.A. (Cantab), Barrister-at-law. The book received wide appreciation, and the Poet himself wrote a long, appreciative review of it in the Bengali monthly, *Prabasi* (Agrahayan, 1336 B. S.). That was a significant recognition of the book which was soon sold out. Since then I made no move for its second edition. After the demise of Tagore in August 1941, I was requested by some of my friends to publish an account of Tagore's political ideologies, scattered over his voluminous writings in English and in Bengali. The idea caught me, but owing to pressure of work I could not proceed with my plan. When the War terminated in 1945, I settled down to the writing of the present book. It is entirely written anew, incorporating, however, the material of my earlier work. I have sought to present Tagore's political and social ideologies in the context of world thought. I hope it will attract the attention of students of political thought. Those who guide men and affairs will find that Tagore cannot be neglected in the designing of the shape of things to come.

I hasten to place it on record that I received invaluable help, at every stage, from my esteemed friend, Mr. Pulin Behari Sen, M.A.,

Assistant Secretary, Visva-Bharati Publishing Department, who is an acknowledged authority on Tagore's texts. At my instance, he very kindly compiled a bibliography of Tagore's political writings, which is appended to the book, and it will prove immensely useful to the future research worker. My thanks are also due to Professor Sadhan Ghose, M.A., of St. Xavier's College, for many helpful suggestions. My wife is responsible for the reading of proofs and the preparation of Index, besides the checking of references and other technical details in making the manuscript ready. I do not wish to take away the merit of her self-imposed task by tendering formal thanks. I cannot forget the cordial co-operation of the publisher, Mr. Sures Chandra Das, M.A., who took great care to overcome the war-time difficulties of speedy publication.

CALCUTTA

November 1946.

S. S.

## CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY</b>	..	..	..	<b>1</b>
(i) The Music of Life	..	..	..	<b>4</b>
(ii) Sources of Influence	..	..	..	<b>10</b>
(iii) Tagore And Gandhi	..	..	..	<b>22</b>
<b>CHAPTER II. THE BACKGROUND</b>	..	..	..	<b>33</b>
(i) Currents of Indian History	..	..	..	<b>34</b>
(ii) The Hindu Tradition	..	..	..	<b>50</b>
<b>CHAPTER III. THE APPROACH TO POLITICS</b>	..	..	..	<b>58</b>
(i) Tagore's Dialectics	..	..	..	<b>60</b>
(ii) The Problem of Reality	..	..	..	<b>69</b>
(iii) Social Reconstruction	..	..	..	<b>73</b>
(iv) Concept of Patriotism	..	..	..	<b>102</b>
(v) Bases of Internationalism	..	..	..	<b>109</b>
(vi) Doctrine of Natural Right	..	..	..	<b>122</b>
<b>CHAPTER IV. THE NATION AND ITS CULT</b>	..	..	..	<b>128</b>
(i) What the Nation Means	..	..	..	<b>130</b>
(ii) The Cult of The Nation	..	..	..	<b>133</b>
(iii) Soulless Industrialisation	..	..	..	<b>139</b>
(iv) The East And The West	..	..	..	<b>148</b>
<b>CHAPTER V. HINDU-MOSLEM RELATIONS</b>	..	..	..	<b>169</b>
(i) Religious Differences	..	..	..	<b>173</b>
(ii) The British Game	..	..	..	<b>185</b>
(iii) The Real Problem	..	..	..	<b>190</b>
(iv) The Partition of India	..	..	..	<b>196</b>
<b>CHAPTER VI. BRITISH RULE IN INDIA</b>	..	..	..	<b>202</b>
(i) The First Reaction	..	..	..	<b>203</b>
(ii) British Administration	..	..	..	<b>208</b>
(iii) Constructive Approach	..	..	..	<b>228</b>
(iv) The Indian Situation	..	..	..	<b>243</b>
<b>CHAPTER VII. IDEALS OF EDUCATION</b>	..	..	..	<b>258</b>
(i) The Santiniketan School	..	..	..	<b>274</b>
(ii) The Visva-Bharati	..	..	..	<b>285</b>
<b>CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION</b>	..	..	..	<b>290</b>
(i) The Historical Approach	..	..	..	<b>294</b>
(ii) The Cult of Power	..	..	..	<b>313</b>
(iii) The Tagore Thesis	..	..	..	<b>317</b>
Index	..	..	..	<b>331</b>
Bibliography	..	..	..	<b>335</b>



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

Rabindranath Tagore was born in the post-Mutiny period of stress and strain (in 1861). On the one hand, the liberal tradition in English education and English political history took root in India, and the flood-gates of European liberalism were thrown open in our land of orthodoxy by the driving force of Raja Rammohan Roy. Tagore himself described the situation in *My Reminiscences* :

“When I was young we were all full of admiration for Europe, with its high civilization and its vast scientific progress, and especially for England which had brought this knowledge to our own doors. We had come to know England through her glorious literature, which had brought a new inspiration into our young lives. The English authors, whose books and poems we studied, were full of love for humanity, justice and freedom. This great literary tradition had come down to us from the revolution period. We felt its power in Wordsworth’s sonnets about human liberty. We gloried in it even in the immature productions of Shelley, written in the enthusiasm of his youth, when he declared against the tyranny of priestcrafts and preached the overthrow of all despotisms through the power of suffering bravely endured. All this fired our youthful imaginations. We believed with all our simple faith that even if we rebelled against foreign rule, we should have the sympathy of the West. We felt that England was on our side in wishing us to gain our freedom.”

But there was the other side. The awakening of the Indian mind received a rude shock from the racial arrogance of the ruling class. After the Mutiny, the racial cleavage became more marked. A retaliatory spirit revealed itself. Englishmen were caught by the evil spirit of vendetta. Foreign rule which is always abnormal became irksome. The massacres at Cawnpore and other places were followed by horrible reprisals, but still the ruling class did not forget the Mutiny. The period that followed was one of ignoring

and humiliating the Indian. The aftermath of the Mutiny was disastrous in so far as the friendly relations that were growing between the ruler and the ruled were shattered. It poisoned the whole atmosphere. The Queen's Proclamation about racial and religious equality was not meant to be observed, as could be gathered from a confidential despatch of Lord Lytton which reads as follows :

"We all know that these claims and expectations can never be fulfilled. We have to choose between prohibiting them and cheating them, and we have chosen the least straightforward course . . . Both the Governments of England and India appear to me, up to the present moment, unable to answer satisfactorily the charge of having taken every means in their power of breaking to the heart the words of promise which they have uttered to the ear."

This position was quite in contrast to that taken by the Court of Directors in their period of rule before the Mutiny. The Charter of 1833 declared that "no Indian by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour, or any of them, shall be disabled from holding any place, office, or any employment, under the said Government." The Court of Directors defined the new Charter as follows :

"The Court conceives this section to mean that there shall be no governing caste in British India ; that, whatever other tests of qualification shall be adopted, distinction of race or religion shall not be of that number ; that no subject of the King, whether of Indian, or British, or mixed descent, shall be excluded from posts usually conferred on un-covenanted servants, or from covenanted service itself provided he be otherwise eligible."

This Charter of 1833 found, in a sense, recognition in the Queen's Proclamation which was often, very often, dishonoured in the period that followed. Since 1858 when the affairs of the Company were transferred to the British Crown, the covenanted civil service became "a rigid oligarchy with sovereign rights of its own which were rarely disputed." The British Parliament allowed the civilians to build up their policy in India with the least interference, and racial arrogance left its impress on their Indian policy. British civilians under the Crown in their social intercourse became



exclusive, and this exclusiveness was helped by the growing number of English women settling with their husbands in India. In discharging administrative tasks they became unsympathetic to Indians. In the days of the Company's rule, British civilians loved India and served India better, and they were better loved in return. At least there was no exclusive club life, and there was no unsympathetic rule "looking much more to England than to India." The bitterness of race feeling became severe in the post-Mutiny period. Sir Henry Cotton and others bore testimony to it. And in fact, English rulers in India were so arrogant, exclusive and unsympathetic, that the starting of the Indian National Congress in 1885 would not have been possible if its founder was not an Englishman. The idea of the Indian National Congress originated with Mr. A. O. Hume, and it was furthered by the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin.

Tagore was nursed in the traditions bequeathed by Raja Rammohan Roy ; he had the political ideals of his father, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, before him. In this context, it may be stated that a great political document of constructive statesmanship emanated from the British Indian Association in 1852 when Debendranath Tagore was its Honorary Secretary. The British Indian Association sent a memorable petition to Parliament in 1852 surveying the whole field of administration with constructive suggestions, and there was a definite charge in the said petition that "they (Indians) have not profited by their connection with Great Britain to the extent which they had a right to look for." This grievance was voiced by Debendranath as the Secretary of the British Indian Association, and this grievance found expression in the various essays and articles of Rabindranath Tagore.

It was true that England soon tore herself away from the vulgar imperialism of Disraeli and was very soon cleansed by the awakened conscience of Gladstone and Bright, Fawcett and Bradlaugh, but British rule in India could hardly be beneficial to India. Gladstone insisted that "our title to be in India depends on a first

condition, namely, that our being there is profitable to the Indian people, and on a second condition, that we can make Indians themselves both see and understand it to be profitable." But these conditions were never fulfilled.

### THE MUSIC OF LIFE

Tagore's *Prabhat Sangit* (Morning Songs), published in 1883, when he was aged only 22, dates the beginning of his real awakening. It was true that at the ninth anniversary of the Hindu Mela, a patriotic gathering held annually in Calcutta (sponsored in 1867 by Rajnarain Bose), Tagore, a lad of 13 years and 9 months, recited a Bengali poem on India, composed by himself. That was his first public appearance in 1875. His first appearance as a public speaker was in 1881 in connection with the discourse on "Music and Feeling" at the Lecture Theatre of the Calcutta Medical College. But in *Prabhat Sangit* there was the first throwing forth of Tagore's inner self outwards. To quote Tagore, "in the *Morning Songs* I celebrated the sudden opening of a gate." On all a sudden Tagore felt that his heart had flung open his doors and "let the crowd of world rush in, greeting each other." Tagore wrote his *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga* (The Awakening of the Waterfall), the key-poem of *Prabhat Sangit*, at 10, Sudder Street, Calcutta, and in *My Reminiscences* he described in the following way the experience out of which it sprang:

"Where the Sudder Street ends, trees in the garden of Free School Street are visible. One morning I was standing in the verandah, looking at them. The sun was rising above the screen of their leaves, and as I was watching it, suddenly in a moment a veil seemed to be lifted from the eyes. I found the world wrapt in an inexpressible glory with its waves of joy and beauty bursting and breaking on all sides. A veil was suddenly withdrawn, and everything became luminous. The whole scene was one perfect music—one marvellous rhythm. That very day the poem known as "The Fountain Awakened from its Dream" flowed on like a fountain itself. There was nothing and no one whom I did not love at that moment.

I seemed to witness, in the wholeness of my vision, the movements of the body of all humanity, and to feel the beat of the music and rhythm of a mystic dance."

In the "Awakening of the Waterfall" Tagore wrote passionately :

"And I—I will pour of compassion a river ;  
 The prisons of stones I will break, will deliver ;  
 I will flood the earth, and, with rapture mad,  
   pour music glad.  
 With dishevelled tresses, and gathering flowers,  
 With rainbow wings wide-spread, through the hours,  
 I shall run and scatter my laughter bright  
   In the dear sunlight.  
 I shall run from peak to peak, and from hill  
 To hill my leaping waters spill,  
 Loudly shall laugh and with claps keep time  
   To my own steps' chime."

After 1890 he frequently toured in North Bengal to look after the affairs of his zemindary estate. He also went over to Cuttack to inspect his zemindary. In this connection, the Settlement Officer's account of the estate of the Poet, as extracted from the *Bengal District Gazetteers—Rajshahi* by Mr. L. S. S. O'Malley (1916), is given below to show the ideas of zemindary management by the Tagore family :

"A very favourable example of estate government is shown in the property of the poet, Sir Rabindranath Tagore. The proprietors brook no rivals. Sub-infeudation with the estate is forbidden ; raiyats are not allowed to sublet on pain of ejectment. There are three divisions of the estate, each under a sub-Manager with a staff of tahsildars, whose accounts are strictly supervised. Half of the dakhilas are checked by an officer of the head office. Employees are expected to deal fairly with the raiyats, and unpopularity earns dismissal. Registration of transfer is granted on a fixed fee, but is refused in the case of an undesirable transferee. Remissions of rent are granted, when inability to pay is proved. In 1912, it is said that the amount remitted was Rs. 57,595. There are lower primary schools in each division ; and at Patisar, the centre of management, there is a High English School with 250 students and a charitable dispensary. These are maintained out of a fund to which the estate contributes annually Rs. 1,250, and the

rai-yats 6 pies per rupee in their rent. There is an annual grant of Rs. 240 for the relief of the crippled and the blind. An agricultural bank advances loans to rai-yats at 12 per cent per annum. The depositors are chiefly Calcutta friends of the poet, who get interest at 7 per cent. The bank has about Rs. 90,000 invested in loans."

In the management of his zemindary estate, Tagore came into intimate contact with the patient, submissive, family-loving, home-clinging, exploited rai-yats. He wrote at that time a remarkable article on *Stri Majoor* (Woman Labourer). His experiences taught him that our rai-yats, helpless, infantile children of Providence, "must have food brought to their very lips, or they are undone. When the breasts of Mother Earth dry up, they are at a loss what to do, and can only cry. But no sooner is their hunger satisfied than they forget all their past sufferings." In a letter written about that time Tagore significantly observed :

"I know not whether the socialistic ideal of a more equal distribution of wealth is attainable, but if not, then such dispensation of Providence is indeed cruel, and man a truly unfortunate creature. For if in this world misery must exist, so be it ; but let some little loophole, some glimpses of possibility at least, be left, which may serve to urge the nobler portion of humanity to hope and struggle unceasingly for its alleviation."

This consciousness of the abject condition and miserable helplessness of our own people was the base of his political philosophy that was adumbrated in the years that followed 1883. Since then, he had shown keen interest in the politics of the country. Some of his famous political papers were read at that period. In a significant poem, *Ebar Firao Moray* (Turn Me Away Now) Tagore gave a clarion call to the country in 1894 to turn back from the life of ease to the life of struggles and realities. There he urged :

"Lo ! there stand those stolid, silent figures with heads stooped so low. In their sullen, sunken faces is written the tragedy of centuries. So long and only so long as life does not depart from them, they perforce slacken their pace in the walk of life in the same proportion as burdens multiply.

Thereafter, they hand down the legacy of woe and suffering from generation to generation.

They do not bemoan Fate, nor do they swear in the name of God. They are impervious to offence and do not blame any man either. They carry on their blasted existence with a handful of rice that befalls their lot.

When this meagre subsistence is wrested from them, when cruel arrogant oppressions pierce their hearts—even then they know not how to appeal for bare justice and to whom.

For once do they only raise their voice in prayer to God—the solace of the poor, and then, with a heavy sigh, breathe their last in speechless agony.

These mute, depressed and ignorant people must be endowed with education. These spent-up, withered and broken-hearted men must be rejuvenated with hope.

Men must call them round and say—"For once lift up heads together and stand united. Behold the one that you are afraid of is personified Injustice, and cannot hold the ground against your united front.

The moment you arise from your slumber, he will disappear from the scene. The moment you stand before him, he will take to heels, frightened and abashed, like so many dogs on the wayside.

Remember that Heaven does not help him, and he has no allies. His parade of power is only on the surface, he knows his own shallowness within."

Even before the Bengal partition agitation<sup>1</sup> swept the country and gave a new impetus to our national awakening, Tagore's political theory assumed a definite form, and in addressing the students at the Classic Theatre in Calcutta Tagore urged in 1905 :

"The downtrodden and the despised who have become callous and oblivious of even the rights of their humanity must be taught the meaning of the word 'brother.' Teach them to be strong and to protect themselves ; for that is the only way. Take each of you charge of some village and organise it. Educate the villagers and show them how to put forward their united strength. Look not for fame or praise in this undertaking. Do not expect even the gratitude of those for whom you would give your life, but be prepared rather for their opposition."

According to Tagore, men were parasites not only when

<sup>1</sup> The agitation arose from the Proclamation, during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon, of separating the eastern part of Bengal from the rest of the province. The first Governor of Eastern Bengal was Sir Bamfylde Fuller. The partition was unsettled in 1911.

they were lifeless hangers-on, drawing nutriment from others, but also when they surrendered themselves to the tide of the given condition. A parasite moves on without his own effort, and he fails to achieve the impossible which is befitting for a mobile man. It is not in the nature of man to be satisfied with the existing state of affairs ; he likes to break his own fetters. In India this parasitical character, this dependence on environment and condition, have sucked the life-blood of society. When Tagore was editing *Sadhana* (a Bengali monthly brought out in collaboration with Sudhindranath Tagore), he sought to impress his countrymen that man must earn his freedom ; he was not to ask for it through petition. The real tragedy befalls him when he is weak in heart. When he was editing *Bangadarshan* in 1905-6, he found Bengal much too excited over the partition question. In anger and in grief Bengalees boycotted British goods. The movement was "artificial" in the sense that they tried to strike at the British, but they did not look towards their countrymen through love and service. Tagore was then insistent on pointing out that the Englishman in India was an external fact and that their own country was the most true and complete fact. In our national movement the true fact must be recognised first, or else we shall be frittering our efforts away in the sand of illusion. In 1905 Tagore called on his countrymen and said : "Try to build up your country by cultivating your own strength, because realisation becomes complete through creation. The Providence finds its own self in his own creation. We can realise our own self truly in the country when we seek to create our country by our thought, our activity and our service. Man's homeland is the creation of his own mind, and that is why the soul realises itself, finds its own expression in his own country."<sup>1</sup> In his article on "*Swadeshi Samaj*" in 1904, Tagore asked us to win back the country, not from others, but from the overpowering orbit of inactivity, indifference. In his view,

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on *Satyer Awhan* (The Call of Truth) in 1328 B.S. (1921).

we have thrown ourselves more and more into the pit of sloth and inactivity, when we have approached the British Government with folded hands asking for mercy.

Tagore's analysis and message did not appeal to his countrymen. Bengal was at that period of the partition agitation burning herself in the flame of anger; she discarded for the time being begging with folded hands; she started begging with red eyes and clamorous voice. Essentially, the whole movement did not seek to make the country rich; it wanted to achieve its object by overpowering the ruler with grimaces and angry words and letting out the emotion in violent channels. But that emotion was not utilised to build something permanent for the reconstruction of the country with patience, skill and foresight. That emotional outburst did not awaken the country's mind along constructive lines; it led the whole movement on to an extraneous channel. It made the people look towards the English ruler, and towards the wounds and sufferings of the country. This was chiefly for this reason, as Tagore argued, that we had been immobile for a long period and that our hearts were not awake to the ideals of service. This dull, lifeless society with human hearts palsied in inaction was not helpful for generating a constructive movement in the country.

During the Bengal partition agitation, a group of youngmen tried hard for political revolution through the path of violence. Tagore offered his obeisance to those who sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of political ideals, as their failures were ablaze with the radiance of living souls. Tagore criticised their actions, but he could not but acknowledge the greatness of the living souls. Those youngmen sacrificed themselves on behalf of the country as a whole, but political revolution could not succeed through such short-cuts. The country attains salvation only when all its parts pulsate with passion for the recovery of the motherland. This was Tagore's main thesis. The country must rise as a whole and not in parts; all the component parts must be equally fit to play their role. The few cannot

bring about the recovery of the entire country. That is the lesson of history. Unreasoning faith, blind habits of mind, adherence to customs that have no merit save their age, the repression of intellect and heart in the unproductive channel of inaction—all this is the antithesis of the forces that reveal men in their full glory and dignity. This is the root cause of our degeneration, and Tagore could not believe that any miracle can happen when the root cause remains unattended to.

Tagore repeatedly cautioned his countrymen :

“What is it that you rely on when you venture to claim ? Your physical strength ?—that you have not. The loudness of your voice ?—that is not so penetrating as you imagine. Some great Englishmen behind you ?—where, oh where are they ? But if you have justice on your side, place on that your whole reliance. None can deprive you of the right to suffer. The glory of sacrificing yourself for the truth, for the right, for the good of your fellow-men awaits you at the end of the arduous road. If boons you deserve, you will get them from the dweller within.”<sup>1</sup>

### SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

The purpose of a political philosophy is not merely to understand the world forces, but to change them on approved lines. With Tagore, philosophy is the self-consciousness of an individual, aspiring after free movement, directing the world forces in a process of development. It must, therefore, set forth certain spiritual principles which endure, move human thought and action, and release the innate forces. It has not only to deal with facts but the spirit, the innermost recesses that shake the very being of man. In the evolution of life and mind, it is not the objective attitude alone that counts ; the subjective approach can hardly be dispensed with. Human beings have inner life, subjective appreciation, desires and valuations.

There is a common belief that materialism and spiritualism can hardly co-exist. Tagore has never interpreted

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on *Choto-O-Baro* (The Great and the Small).



spiritualism in the sense that material obligations will be disregarded. Tagore preached the extension of the private interests of a particular man to the general interests of the people without the sacrifice of the identity of any of the partners. There he is distinct from a Marxist, as he has never taken his place in the struggle for proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship.

Contradiction leads forward. But all changes are not necessarily progressive. There must be criteria to judge whether the changes are progressive or not. In the category of criteria, there must be a recognition of the inner life of man, rather a close harmony between the needs of the body and the soul. Human obligations are there to forge a better social order; obligations are incumbent upon all; they are to be discharged by all.

Tagore was a believer in the subjective side of ethics—morality dictated by individual conscience. The ideals of social determinism, freedom as the recognition of necessity, morality as a class-morality, as propounded by Marxists, did not influence Tagore's thought. It is true that society largely determines the nature of the individual's duties, but these have to be accepted by the individual as a free agent. There is individual conscience and social determination. Individual conscience is undoubtedly influenced by society, but it is not wholly social. It is in the appreciation of the validity of the values that Tagore differs fundamentally from Marxists. The emotional constitution of man's mind is a reality to him. Accordingly, it is the individual that builds civilisation; the majorities are not always right; and people are not mere slaves of material circumstances. To come to the point, as urged by Tagore, human will must be fertilised by subjectivism. But this subjectivism must be different from teleology and fatalism.

On analysis it is found that Tagore was considerably influenced by the teachings of the Upanishads, Buddha, Bengal Vaishnavism, Kabir, the Baul cult, besides the bewitching grandeur of European liberal culture. The

influence of the Upanishads, which proclaim truths having universal significance, on Tagore's thought is acknowledged by the Poet himself. Tagore writes in his preface to *Sadhana*, published in 1913 :

"The writer has been brought up in a family where texts of the Upanishads are used in daily worship ; and he has had before him the example of his father, who lived his long life in the closest communion with God, while not neglecting his duties to the world, or allowing his keen interest in all human affairs to suffer any abatement. .... To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth ; and I have used them, both in my own life and preachings, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation, my own personal testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality."

Tagore claimed that he was brought up in an atmosphere of aspiration, aspiration for the expansion of the human spirit. His family was not to conform to the conventions that had not the value of truth, as they were ostracised by society because of his father freeing himself from accepted sectarian barriers. To quote Tagore, "We in our home sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of mind in our social environment." It was a great advantage to the family of the Poet ; it was a great help to the Poet himself. So he lost faith in the ghosts of ideals which no longer had a living reality and renewed his confidence in those individuals who rejected petty vanities and barriers between man and man. In a memorable poem he paid homage to Buddha who stood against the ravenous orgies of carnage where the food and the feeders were being torn to pieces. The following is taken from his Ode to Buddha :

"Man's heart is anguished with the fever of unrest,  
With the poison of self-seeking,  
With a thirst that knows no end.  
Countries far and wide, flaunt on their foreheads  
The blood-red mark of hatred.  
Touch them with thy right hand,  
Make them one in spirit,

Bring harmony into their life,  
 Bring rhythm of beauty.  
 O Serene, O Free, thou soul of infinite sanctity,  
 Cleanse this earth of her stains, O Merciful."

It was Buddha who taught mankind not to hate the enemy.  
 Such verses are found in the *Dhammapada* :

"Not by hatred does hatred ever come to rest,  
 By non-hatred only does it cease,  
 This is an everlasting rule."

"By non-wrath let him conquer wrath,  
 By goodness the wicked shall be overcome,  
 The stingy shall be conquered by a gift,  
 Let him conquer by truth the teller of lies."

In obedience to such messages, Tagore repeatedly urged :

"If political freedom be achieved by us, well and good. But even if that does not happen, let us not, with heaps of tainted political rubbish, obstruct our own way to larger freedom of the soul. . . . Where the atmosphere is thin, there is the storm centre ; where there is weakness, thither is greed attracted, and round it rages the conflict of the strong. Where man does not stand firm on his greatness, his manhood leaks away through his relaxed moral fibre, and Satan gets his chance to mock at God."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore's restlessness, struggling for a better scheme of things, deep longing for an endless journey in the pursuit of the great unknown—all this is ascribed to Tagore's intimate acquaintance with European thought of the 19th century. It is not necessarily a symbol of Western influence on Tagore's mind, because the hymn of "Onward March" in *Aitareya Brahmana* shows that Indian thought and philosophy never stood for a stagnant order. Tagore's rebellious mind drank deep in the philosophy of movement, preached especially in *Aitareya Brahmana*.<sup>2</sup> The following

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on *Choto-O-Baro* (The Great and the Small).

<sup>2</sup> The composer of the *Aitareya Brahmana*, the best of all Brahmanas in the R̥gveda, was the son of a lowly woman. According to the current legend, he had received his education at the hands of the Earth. Hence, he received the name of Mahidasa, the servant of the Earth. The ardent desire for journeying freely on an uninterrupted endless course formed the key-note of the verses of the Aitareya and the poems of Tagore. Consult Kshiti Mohan Sen's article on the "Genius of Rabindranath" in the Tagore Birthday Number, 1941.

translations are quoted from the said hymn of "Onward March":

"One who is weary of long journey acquires a grace incomparable. However important and great one might be, if he sits idle in the world he is reduced to insignificance. He who walks endlessly has God as his comrade and co-traveller. Hence, O Traveller, march along."

"An idle man's fate sits idle too. When one rises and stands upright, his fate also rises and stands up. As he lies down, his fate lies down with him. He who marches along, has his fate marching with him. Hence, O Traveller, march along."

"To march along is to gain immortality; marching by itself is the sweetest fruit of the journey. Look at the sun—the ever glorious and eternal traveller, who once having started on its journey has never felt drowsy. Hence, O Traveller, march along."

The sages have asked in the Atharvaveda:

"Why cannot the wind remain still, why has the human no rest? Why, and in search of what, does the water run out and cannot stop in its flow even for a moment."

The call of the eternal, this dynamic urge,—all this gave shape to Tagore's thought and philosophy. He had never known rest; he had not advocated rest. That was why he had built up no cult of his own. He has moved on and on, without rest. This being the key-note of Tagore's thought, he is of the company of those spiritual rebels of ancient India.

Tagore worshipped Man; he paid his best regards at the altar of humanity; but his whole life was a voyage towards the unknown. Tagore has repeatedly urged:

"Man cannot reach the shrine, if he does not make the pilgrimage." He had remained a pilgrim all his life; he had never followed any short-cut to reach the shrine.

Vaishnavism had two sides, philosophy and life. Chaitanya based his thought on the Vedanta, but his emotional side got the upper hand of the philosophy. Bengal "nationalised" Vaishnavism through emphasis on this emotional aspect. The five different paths (*viz.*, *shanta*, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *batsalya* and *madhura*) whereby

soul approaches Krishna as saint, servant, friend, parent or lover and the final stage of ineffable-union-in-separateness influenced Bengal Vaishnavism.

Tagore was influenced by the neo-bhakti cult of Chaitanya.<sup>1</sup> It was Chaitanya who sought to blend the canonical bhakti of the South with the natural bhakti of Bengal. This synthesis (and not the pre-Chaitanya Vaishnavism as a philosophical doctrine) appealed to Tagore, and Chaitanya's attempt to scorn caste-rules evoked appreciation. But, in fact, he was much more influenced by the poets of early Vaishnavism like Joydev, Vidyapati and Chandidas. There is legitimate doubt if Chaitanya's philosophical and theological doctrines, as interpreted by Rup, Sanatan, and Jiva Goswami, Ray Ramananda, and Krishnadas Kaviraj, influenced Tagore in any way, but the declaration of Chandidas moved him greatly: "Listen, Oh brother man, the truth of man is the highest of truths, there is no other truth above it." The influence of early Vaishnava poets is discernible in Tagore's attempt of writing poetry after them under the pseudo-name of *Vanusinha*. The Vaishnava literature was musical, poetical, dramatic and overflowing. It caught Tagore in a trance.

Tagore was also influenced by the great liberal thinker of mediæval India, Kabir,<sup>2</sup> who never accepted the meaningless formalism of the Hindu or of the Mahomedan society. The essence of Kabir's teaching is as follows<sup>3</sup>:

"If you care for truth and spiritual life, get over all artificial hindrances; be true to your own self, and be natural. For truth is natural and simple; you need not look for it in the external world. It is not to be found in vows, garbs, rituals, pilgrimage and sectarianism. Truth remains within. One is to find it out by love, devotion and charity. Do not cherish ill-will towards any one; do not hurt any one; for God dwells in every creature. The same God is earnestly sought after in all religions which differ only in naming

<sup>1</sup> Born in 1485 and died in 1533.

<sup>2</sup> Born about the year 1440.

<sup>3</sup> Kshiti Mohan Sen's *Mediæval Mysticism of India*, Pp. 99-100.

Him. This makes futile all religious quarrels that go on between Hindus and Mussalmans and all other religions ; so give up ego and vanity, and shun artificiality and untruth, and considering everyone as your own self, fill up your heart with divine love and devotion. Then your Shadhana will be crowned with success. This life is an ephemeral thing. So without losing time in vain pursuits seek shelter with God. You need not seek Him in the external world ; for He is within your heart where you will find Him easily. Otherwise, you will tire yourself out by treading the path of the scriptures, holy places, rituals and logic."

A close student of Tagore's thought will easily recognise how mightily influenced he was by Kabir and liberal thinkers of his type. As a token of his regard for Kabir, Tagore presented a selection of Kabir's songs to the Western reader after translating them in English from the printed Hindi text with the Bengali translation of Mr. Kshiti Mohan Sen.<sup>1</sup>

Tagore's fondness for such unscriptural sadhana, without the influence of scholasticism on it, led him on to the appreciation of the Baul songs of Bengal which gush forth in their spontaneity and break through the barriers of rules, prescriptive as well as proscriptive. The crusade against caste, image worship, and sectarianism, as could be found in Kabir's songs and Baul songs, was kept up in full glory and warmth in Tagore's poems and writings. A typical Baul song is given below :

"Thy path, O Lord, is hidden by mosque and temple.

I hear thy call, but the guru stops the way.

What gives peace to my mind, sets the world ablaze,—

The cult of the One dies in the conflict of many,

The door to it is closed by many a lock, of Koran,

Puran and rosary,

Even the way of renunciation is full of tribulation,

Wherefore Madan weeps in despair."

Tagore was struck by the Baul songs in the simplicity of their words, the depth of their thoughts, the penetrating poignancy of their tunes. In them the inspiration of

<sup>1</sup> *Kabir's Poems* translated by Rabindranath Tagore, assisted by Evelyn Underhill, 1915.

India's higher culture was at work. In them all differences and antagonisms, all the multitudinous clashes of variety were found resolved. So Tagore believed that they had great value for the purpose of History, and accordingly, Bauls and their cult of Man made the profoundest appeal to him. They are devotees recruited from the lowest strata of Hindu and Moslem communities, but the Baul cult while having no room for scriptures, accepts love of Man and recognises the temple of God in the heart of Man. The following verse of Narahari explains the cult of the Baul :

“That is why, brother, I become a madcap Baul,  
No master I obey, nor injunctions, canons or customs,—  
Now no man-made distinctions have any hold on me,—  
And I reveal only in the gladness of my own welling love.  
In love there is no separation, but co-mingling always,  
So I rejoice in song and dance with each and all.”

Tagore has given his adoration to all those who have despised sectarianism and accepted Man as the real deity to love and serve. According to him, “sectarianism is materialistic. It ever tries to build its tower of triumph with its numerical strength, temporal power and external observances. It breeds in the minds of its members a jealous sense of separateness that gives rise to conflicts more deadly than conflicts of worldly interests. It is a worse enemy of the truth of religion than atheism, for sectarianism proudly appropriates as its own share the best portion of the homage that we bring to our God.”<sup>1</sup>

Tagore sincerely believed that “the history of man is the history of the building up of a human universe, as has been proved by the fact that everything great in human activity inevitably belongs to all humanity.” Man is a mere animal when he is bound up within the narrow enclosure ; he is something more than that when he discharges his obligations to his home, his society, his

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's Presidential message to the Parliament of Religions held in Calcutta on the 28th January, 1929, in connection with the Brahmo Samaj Centenary.

country and to the universe. That is his complete being. The history of Man is the history of his breaking the prison wall open. So long as this movement of progress is maintained, there is "the taste of the infinite at every point." Tagore was grieved to find that India had stopped in the march of history. He observed that the races of men who had allowed themselves to be stranded upon the sands of their past achievements, like a whale on the sea-shore, would remain, to the end of their days, the prey of ravenous evils from all sides.<sup>1</sup> They become a menace to Man if their triumphant movement of realisation is curbed and mutilated.

Tagore's vision of the history of India is described by him in the following way :

"In India, the history of humanity is seeking to elaborate a definite synthesis. The history of India is not the history of Aryans, it is not the history of the Hindus, nor a history of only Hindus and Moslems taken together. Of late the British have come in and occupied an important place in India's history. If India had been deprived of touch with the West, she would have lacked an element essential for her attainment of perfection. On us today is thrown the responsibility of building up a greater India in which Hindu and Mussalman and Christian, the dark-skinned and the white-skinned, will all find their place."

This vision made Tagore sing in a gladsome pæan :

"Come Aryan, Non-Aryan, Hindu, Mussalman, come,  
Come ye Parsees, O' Christians, come Ye one in all,  
Come Brahmins, let your hearts be hallowed by holding  
all men by the hand,  
Come all ye who are shunned and isolated, wipe out  
all dishonour.  
Come to the crowning of the Mother, fill the sacred  
bowl  
With water that is sanctified by the touch of all,  
In this land of India, on the shore of vast humanity."

When Tagore began his career, he took inspiration from English literature. He also had established acquaintance with European literature. He read the works of Dante

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on the *Philosophy of Leisure*.



and Heine and Goethe. He, however, wanted to know German literature and learnt the German language with the help of a missionary lady from Germany. He read Heine and Goethe in the original German.

It must not be forgotten that when Tagore was born, the currents of three movements were surging in Bengal. The religious movement which was initiated by Raja Ram-mohan Roy tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance. The Poet's father was one of the great leaders of that movement. The literary movement under the guidance of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee started in the channel of expression of the new ideal. In the latter part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century Bengali literature lacked movement and was fettered by "a rhetoric rigid as death." Bankim Chandra, to quote the Poet himself, "lifted the dead weight of ponderous forms from our language and with a touch of his magic wand aroused our literature from its age-long sleep." There was the political movement giving expression to the voice of indignation constantly heaped upon Indians by the ruling race. The Indian National Congress, however, took shape many years after the Sepoy Mutiny (that is, in 1885). Before the National Congress was founded, Surendra Nath Banerjee established the Indian Association in 1875, and political forces were coming together for united work under a common organisation to voice the grievances of the people.

The spirit of revolt awakened by the religious, literary and political movements of Bengal influenced Tagore, and in all these movements members of the Tagore family took active part. The Tagore family had one advantage, and it was this. They were ostracised because of their unconventional opinions about religion, and primarily because they were the torch-bearers of new ideals which for

the time being were not found acceptable to the people at large. Hence, they could enjoy "the freedom of the out-caste" and build their own world with their own thoughts and energy of mind. The Tagore family accepted the foundations, based on Indian culture, and sought to build a new superstructure; they believed in the underlying thread of unity and also in the movement for change. Tagore knew and accepted that "revolution must come and men must risk revilement and misunderstanding, especially from those who want to be comfortable, who put their faith in materialism and convention, and who belong truly to the dead past and not to modern times, the past that had its age in distant antiquity when physical flesh and size predominated, and not the mind of man."<sup>1</sup> The revelation of spirit in man is truly modern. Tagore observed: "I am on its side, for I am modern."<sup>2</sup> He belonged to a family which rebelled, which acknowledged loyalty to an inner ideal. And as a revolutionary he carried the flag of freedom of spirit into the shrine of idols,—material power and accumulation.

Tagore did not receive the school and college training, which could set up for him an artificial standard based upon the prescription of the school master. Tagore had freedom; he could be bold, because his family training gave him the utmost freedom in his self-expression. Tagore called himself "a literary outlaw," and he confessed that his acquaintance with the old Vaishnava poems of Bengal which were full of the freedom of metre and courage of expression, made him bold in the literary field. The greater part of Vaishnava lyrics was erotic, but Tagore's imagination was fully occupied with the beauty of their forms and the music of their words. Tagore stated that "their breath, heavily laden with voluptuousness, passed over my mind without distracting it." This freedom, this vagabondage, which made him a "literary outlaw," lifted him out of the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Talks in China*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

rut, directing his political and social philosophies on the highest level of a profound thinker, freed from trammels of pettiness. Tagore was, therefore, to find some basis that was universal, that was eternal, and to discover things which had an everlasting value. He discarded all pride in mere borrowings and proclaimed glory in creation.

Tagore welcomed Rammohun Roy as the herald of modern India, "the very first to bear her offerings to the outside world, and accept for himself and his country the best that the world could offer."<sup>1</sup> Tagore was the bearer of the standard of Rammohun Roy, and his tribute to Raja Rammohun Roy could be fittingly paid in appreciation of Tagore's own work. It was significant how Tagore spoke of Raja Rammohun Roy :

"He (Rammohun Roy) stood alone in his day for the union of India with the world on the broad base of humanity. No blind belief, no ancestral habit was allowed to obscure his vision. With a wonderful breadth of heart and intellect he accepted the West without betraying the East. He, alone, laid the foundation of new Bengal. Rammohun Roy cheerfully put up with persecution in order to extend the field of our knowledge and work, right across from East to West, to gain for us the eternal rights of man in the pursuit of Truth, to enable us to realise that we too had inherited the earth. It was he who first felt and declared that for us Buddha, Christ and Mahammad have spent their lives ; that for each one of us has been stored up the fruits of the discipline of our Rishis; that in whatsoever part of the world whoever had removed obstacles in the path of wisdom, or, breaking the bondage of dead matter, has given freedom to man's true shakti, he is our very own, and through him is each one of us glorified. Rammohun Roy did not assist India to repair her barriers, or to keep cowering behind them,—he led her out into the freedom of space and time, and built for her a bridge between the East and the West. That is why his spirit lives with us, his power of stimulating India's creative energies is not yet exhausted. No blind habit of mind, no pettiness of racial pride, were able to make him commit the folly of rebellion against the manifest purpose of time. That grand purpose which could not have found its fulfilment in the past, but is ever marching

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's address on Rammohun Roy on the occasion of the Brahmo Samaj Centenary.

onwards to the future, found in him the gallant, unflinching standard bearer."

India needs a broad mind which is not afraid of accepting truth from all sources. Such a comprehensive mind was found in Rammohon. Tagore freely acknowledged his gratitude to Rammohon. "The ideal I have formed of the culture which should be universal in India has become clear to me from the life of Rammohon Roy. I have come to feel that the mind which has been matured in the atmosphere of a profound knowledge of its own country, and of the perfect thoughts that have been produced in that land, is ready to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from foreign countries."<sup>1</sup>

#### TAGORE AND GANDHI

The political movement was for long anchored to the educated classes, to those who were influenced by Western education, thought and culture. Our political leaders did not look beyond them, because they knew the Western technique; they studied their own history through the writings of English scholars; they drew inspiration from Burke, Gladstone, Garibaldi, Mazzini etc.; they were not motivated by instinctive affection for their own countrymen, rich and poor, literate and illiterate. But Gandhi appeared on the scene and spoke the language conveying intimacy to the lowliest of low in the country. He made the countrymen his own, did not remain aloof from them. To his call of love the Indian responded in exuberance of enthusiasm. "The state-craft which is regulated by diplomatic considerations is barren. This lesson was of vital importance to us. Through the grace of Mahatma Gandhi we have discovered the infinite prowess of truth. But diplomacy is the cult of the timid and the weak. That is why many of our worldly-wise leaders consider the movement of Mahatma Gandhi as one of the strategic moves of

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Prof. Gilbert Murray in 1934.

their political gamble. Their minds are narrowed down by untruths, so they fail to understand that it is not a superfluity if love is awakened in human minds through love—that is real freedom ; that is the re-discovery of the country's soul ; it is not tied to the apron-string of British rule in India.”<sup>1</sup>

With Tagore this call of Truth was especially significant, because the expression of the hidden and varied forms of human heart is real freedom. When the soul awakens from slumber, becomes freed from the bondage of non-expression, therein it gets the light of illumination. This awakening cannot be brought about by the trader, the soldier ; they can only bring about conflict, separateness and humiliation. Because, greed is not true, love is true. Love breaks off fetters from within ; greed seeks to achieve its object by violence. “ During the Bengal partition agitation we have watched this—we forced the poor to undergo sufferings not through love but through compulsion from without. The reason was this. Greed tries to obtain some specific, narrow objective within a definite time. Love is out to gain not an immediate purpose ; it seeks its own fulfilment in itself.”<sup>2</sup>

Tagore welcomed Gandhi's message, based on truth and non-violence. In a poem on Gandhi Maharaj in 1940, Tagore wrote :

“We who follow Gandhi Maharaj's lead  
Have one thing in common among us ;  
We never fill our purses with spoils from the poor  
Nor bend our knees to the rich.

\* \* \*

Our speeches are straight and simple,  
No diplomatic turns to twist their meaning ;  
Compounding penal code,  
They guide with perfect ease the victims  
To the border of jail.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Tagore's article on *Satyer Awhan* (The Call of Truth) written in 1928 B.S. (1921).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

And when these crowd the path of the prison gate  
 Their stains of insult are washed clean,  
 Their age-long shackles drop to the dust,  
 And on their forehead are stamped Gandhiji's blessings."

Tagore realised that the root of all our miseries was in the consciousness of self, "which must be translated into the consciousness of all before we can solve the mystery of pain and be free." The fountain of activities, when driven through the narrow pipe of egoism, is full of fear and doubt and sorrow, as it does not know its end, "but when it comes out in the open and meets in the bosom of All, it glistens in the light and sings in the joy of freedom."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore, however, could not accept the non-co-operation movement started by Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi's resolution on non-co-operation was adopted at the special session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta in 1920 under the presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai. The Congress adopted the resolution on non-co-operation with the following preamble :

"This Congress is further of opinion that there is no course left open for the people of India but to approve of and adopt the policy of progressive, non-violent non-co-operation, until the said wrongs<sup>2</sup> are righted and Swaraj is established."

Tagore refused to associate himself with the non-co-operation movement as it was negative in character. The movement aimed at—

- (A) Surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation of nominated posts in local bodies.
- (B) Refusal to attend Government levees etc.
- (C) Withdrawal of children from schools and colleges.
- (D) Boycott of British courts.
- (E) Withdrawal of candidates from elections to the reformed Councils under the Act of 1919.
- (F) Boycott of foreign goods.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. W. W. Pearson in 1915.

<sup>2</sup> The wrongs referred to are principally the following: the breach of pledge by the British Government on the Khilafat question, the negligence of Government to punish officers guilty of the massacres in the Punjab in 1919.

(G) Refusal on the part of military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits for service in Mesopotamia.

Tagore had never been an admirer of the negative programme ; he could go in for a creative programme. Instead of boycott of foreign goods, he could appreciate the emphasis on the promotion of indigenous industries ; in the place of the boycott of schools and colleges, he could welcome greater assimilation of Indian culture. Tagore could not endorse the charka-cult, as it was an external thing, not directed towards the cleansing of minds. Tagore did not support non-violent movement by the masses in order to attain some immediate political objective. Tagore's fundamental creed was :

"Egoism is the very root of all sin and suffering, and it can be liquidated only by the feeling of *Maitri* (Fraternity) towards the universe..... Whenever our life is stirred to its depth by Truth, it succeeds in expressing energy in all departments. Then our life comes to be filled, as it were, with a creative ardour. This consciousness of the creative urge is the proof positive of the impact of Truth on our mind."<sup>1</sup>

- So Tagore sang :

"Freedom is in pain which is pure  
Which is in harmony with the boundless,  
In which the shame of self-deceit is destroyed,  
And which leaves to the dust the cage  
Of the living death of vain longing."

All blind methods are easy methods, and Tagore, therefore, could not appreciate the blind force generated by the non-co-operation movement. In 1921, Tagore in his article *Satyer Awhan* (The Call of Truth) explained his stand, and therein he revealed himself. To quote Gandhiji, "I regard the Poet as a sentinel warning us against the approach of enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance, Ignorance and other members of that brood."

Although Tagore differed from Gandhi on certain political questions, he was struck by Gandhi's freedom from

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's address on Greater India in 1927.

any bias of personal or national selfishness. Gandhi's quest of righteousness amidst the battling forces of evil appealed to Tagore profoundly. Paying handsome tribute to Gandhi, Tagore observed :

"Our reverence goes out to the Mahatma whose striving has ever been for Truth; who to the great good fortune of our country at this time of its entry into the new Age, has never, for the sake of immediate results, advised or condoned any departure from the standard of universal morality. He has shown the way how, without wholesale massacre, freedom may be won.....For the first time perhaps, it has been declared that it is for us to yield up life, not to kill, and yet we shall win ! A glorious message, indeed, not a counsel of strategy, not a means to a merely political end. In the course of unrighteous battle death means extinction ; in the non-violent battle of righteousness, something remains ever,—after defeat victory, after death immortality. The Mahatma who has realised this in his own life, compels our belief in this truth."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore had never been an advocate of violence and cruelty. He could not but deprecate the terrorist movement that swept the province of Bengal during the anti-partition movement. Tagore took an active part in the anti-partition agitation which flowed from Lord Curzon's decision to bisect the province of Bengal. He advocated the policy of constructive non-co-operation, composed patriotic songs, addressed many public meetings. Tagore initiated the "Rakhi-bandhan" ceremony as the symbol of the undying unity of Bengal. In the monthly *Bhandar* which Tagore edited, he created a forum for the discussion of the political and economic problems of the country. In his famous paper on *Raja-Proja*, Tagore exposed the imperialist policy of economic exploitation of India. All this happened in 1905. He presided over the Bengal Provincial Conference at Pabna in 1908 where he appealed to youngmen for constructive work and the building up of Hindu-Moslem unity. In his celebrated paper

<sup>1</sup> Authorised translation of Tagore's speech in Bengali to students of Santiniketan in celebration of Gandhi's birthday, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, November 1937.



on *Path-o-Patheya* (The Way and the Wherewithal) he discussed the terrorist outrage at Muzaffarpur and pleaded with his countrymen against restless and destructive demonstrations of their patriotism. He admired the sacrificing spirit of those who staked their life for the cause of the country but could not appreciate the violent methods. Dissatisfied with the character of the anti-partition agitation which had acceptance of narrow political aims and disregard of the wider perspective of social regeneration and enlightenment of the growing alienation between Hindus and Moslems, Tagore wrote in 1907 his article on *Byadhi-o-Tahar-Pratihar* (The Disease and Its Cure) in which he advocated a radical social programme as essential to the attainment of a real and lasting political independence. Disgusted with the terrorist outrages and the discovery of the bomb factory at Manicktolla in Calcutta, Tagore wrote in 1909 the drama *Prayashchitya* (Atonement) advocating the philosophy and technique of non-violent non-co-operation. This philosophy was developed in Tagore's *Mukta-dhara* (The Waterfall) in 1922. His tirade against the political movement based on terrorism found clear expression in his novels, *Ghare-baire* (The Home and the World) in 1915 and *Char-Adhyay* (Four Chapters) in 1934. But it must not be assumed that Tagore had no word of admiration for sacrifices, which were noble though misdirected. To put it in the language of Mr. C. F. Andrews, "The Poet's belief in soul-force has always been fundamental. It colours all his own poems and his own personal outlook upon human life. But whenever the popular methods appeared to him to diverge from that high standard, he became pained and immediately expressed himself in writing."

In fact, Tagore in an exquisite poem on Salutation to Aravinda Ghose, one of the front-rank leaders of the revolutionary movement in Bengal (who was prosecuted for sedition), showed his appreciation of the fighters for India's freedom movement. He wrote :

“ Rabindranath, O Aravinda, bows to thee !  
 O friend, my country's friend, O voice incarnate, free,  
 Of India's soul ! No soft renown doth crown thy lot,  
 Nor pelf nor careless comfort is for thee ; thou'st sought  
 No petty bounty, petty dole ; the beggar's bowl  
 Thou ne'er has held aloft. In wakefulness thy soul  
 Has thou e'er held for boundless full perfection ; birth—  
 For which, all night and day, the God in man on earth  
 Doth strive and strain austere ; which, in solemn voice,  
 The poet sings in thund'rous paeans ; for which rejoice  
 Stout hearts to march on perilous paths ; before whose flame  
 Refulgent, ease bows its head in humbled shame  
 And death forgetteth fear.”

Tagore characterised Aravinda Ghose as the fiery messenger who had come with the lamp of God—where is the King who can with chain or rod chastise him ? Aravinda Ghose was the leader of the “terrorist movement”<sup>1</sup> in Bengal, but Tagore's heart went out in reverence for the supreme sufferings accepted cheerfully by such heroes. Tagore as a believer in the triumph of spirit over flesh recognised the appeal of self-offering for the sake of country. When Mahatma Gandhi undertook a fast unto death at Yeravada Jail over the Communal Award (recognised after modification in the Indian Constitution Act of 1935) in 1932 which sought to separate the depressed classes from the Hindu fold, Tagore requested him to break fast and sent Mahatmaji the following wire :

“It is worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. Though we cannot anticipate what effect it may have upon our rulers who may not understand its immense importance for our people, we feel certain that the supreme appeal of such self-offering to the conscience of own countrymen will not be in vain. I fervently hope that we will not callously allow such national tragedy to reach its extreme length. Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love.”

Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were fundamentally agreed that the wealthy must hold their wealth in trust for their countrymen. Gandhi said : “We are thieves in a

<sup>1</sup> An extremely unhappy expression used in our political literature.

way if we take anything that we do not need for immediate use, and keep it from somebody else who needs it." But he was no socialist, as he did not want to dispossess those who have got possessions.<sup>1</sup> In his book "Ethical Religion," Gandhiji observed :

"If all men realised the obligation of service, they would regard it as a sin to amass wealth ; and then, there would be no inequalities of wealth, and consequently no famine or starvation." In his view, an action is moral when it is done consciously and as a matter of duty. "So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality." Accordingly, Gandhi, along with Tagore, could not believe that social equality could be brought through legislation. Gandhiji explained his central point thus :

"It is my firm conviction that if the State suppressed capitalism by violence, it will be caught in the coils of violence itself, and fail to develop non-violence at any time. The State represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence. Hence, I prefer the doctrine of trusteeship."

Speaking to an audience of Indian socialists in London in 1931, Gandhi admitted that "absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid's definition of a point, and is equally unattainable. But if we strive for it, we shall be able to go further in realising a state of equality on earth than by any other method." Gandhiji frankly stated : "What I would personally prefer would be not a centralisation of power in the hands of the State, but an extension of the sense of trusteeship ; as in my opinion the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the State."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, published by G. A. Nateson & Co., Madras.

<sup>2</sup> Modern Review, October 1935. It is found that Gandhiji believed with Tagore that the State was an organisation based on force, and that to be best governed was to be least governed by the State.

Tagore, in company with Gandhi, looked upon an increase of the power of the State with the greatest fear, because it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which "lies at the root of all progress." Tagore's anti-State attitude and conception of Swaraj agree in essentials with the political thought of Gandhi. The following quotations from Gandhiji's writings in *Young India* make it clear :

"Self-Government means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. Swaraj government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for the regulation of every detail of life. (*Young India*, 6th August 1925).

"I hope to demonstrate that real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority." (*Young India*, 29th January 1925).

Tagore never offered to pay his homage to 'men of corpulent cash ;' in his opinion, money is wealth when it discharges its obligation. Tagore and Gandhi had many things in common, but the surprising thing is, as put by Jawharlal Nehru, that both of these men with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom should differ from each other so greatly. "No two persons could probably differ so much as Gandhi and Tagore," and Jawharlal felt that that showed the richness of India's age-long cultural genius. Gandhiji, however, regarded the Poet as his Gurudev, and in the course of a talk to workers of Santiniketan in December 1945 he said :

"I have found no real conflict between us. I started with a disposition to detect a conflict between Gurudev and myself but ended with the glorious discovery that there was none."

Tagore in one of his letters from Geneva, dated May 6, 1921, to Mr. C. F. Andrews said : "Political controversies occasionally overtake me like a sudden fit of ague, without giving sufficient notice ; and then they leave suddenly,

leaving behind a feeling of malaise. Politics are so wholly against my nature ; and yet, belonging to an unfortunate country, born to an abnormal situation, we find it so difficult to avoid their outbursts." He was sick when he found men suffering ; he was equally sick when he found people overtaken by the passion of patriotism which exaggerated isolated facts and kindled the consciousness of separateness.

If politics means party faction, a poet has nothing to do with it. But it is the mission of a poet to inspire faith in the dream which is unfulfilled ; without faith no future can be created. It is the dreamer who builds up civilisation ; it is he who can realise the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all differences of race. The mind of the Poet did not awkwardly stumble over individual facts of separateness in the human world. He realised that "peace is the inner harmony which dwells in truth, and not in any outer adjustment ; that beauty carries an eternal assurance of our spiritual relationship to reality, which waits for its perfection in the response of our love."

The following "Prayer" by Tagore was representative of his desires and aspirations :

"Let honour come to me from Thee  
Through a call to some desperate task,  
In the pride of poignant suffering.  
Lull me not into languid dreams ;  
Shake me out of this cringing in the dust,  
Out of the fetters that shackle our mind,  
Make futile our destiny ;  
Out of the unreason that bends our dignity down  
Under the discriminate feet of dictators ;  
Shatter this age-long shame of ours,  
And raise our head  
    into the boundless sky,  
    into the generous light,  
    into the air of freedom."

His prayer welled out from his heart which lay anchored to the future of a brighter civilisation, the triumph of the

soul-power. In his robust optimism, Tagore wrote in 1940 (when the world was convulsed by power politics and passing through a devastating war) :

“At the feast of power today  
the cannibals are quarrelling  
over human sacrifice,  
today the face of the earth  
is smeared with glory red.  
But time comes  
when out of this orgy of devastation  
heroic peace will emerge victorious.  
Let flames lick up everything unholy,  
every evil, every weakness  
and burn them into ashes.  
I shall stand firm facing all,  
nor shall I doubt ever !”

## CHAPTER II

### THE BACKGROUND

A true view of the history of India is essential to the understanding of the Indian problem. Tagore complained that we had lost the true view of the history of India. We have been told by foreign historians that dynastic quarrels, foreign conquests, fanatical wars and their resultant atrocities—all these were the chief events in India. It seemed that there was no India apart from the conquest and penetration of the Pathan, the Moghul, the Portuguese, the French and the English. The books on Indian history hardly make any reference to the life-current that flowed in real India, to the changes in society and to the waves of welfare-efforts in the country. But it was there India resided ; it was with that aspect of life that Indians were intimately associated. It is unfortunate that our historical chronicles are of no help to the understanding of India. In the history of India, from the conquest of Mahmud to the Imperial vagaries of Lord Curzon, no event threw a flood of light on the inner self of India. It is not essential that the history of every country should be cast in the same mould. India suffered from natural poverty in respect of her political history. It was not the case with Britons who have won wars, spread the tentacles of commercial organisation, acquired riches and kingdoms. But our forefathers had no remarkable achievements in these spheres. We shall have to know what they did, or else we would not know what should be done. The system of education that gave us no opportunity to know our real India was responsible for the tearing of the bond of union with the country ; this made us de-Indianised.

## CURRENTS OF INDIAN HISTORY

India has, since the beginning of her history, tried to establish unity in diversity. That has been her chief mission; that is her message to the world outside. Naturally, India remained impervious to political freedom. Political consciousness and political vanity originate from a sensibility of regarding others as distinct from one's own people. The attempt to establish supremacy of oneself in scorn of and as against the other is the basis of political greatness. But to establish relations with others, to work out harmony in the inner self of an individual forms the foundation of religious and social progress. The political unity of European civilisation breeds conflict; the social cohesiveness of India helps co-operation. Political unity keeps alive the flames of conflict between man and man, the ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor.

Man's history, Tagore observed, is shaped according to the difficulties it encounters. India was faced with the race problem, as "races ethnologically different have in this country come into close contact" India accomplished her task through social regulation of differences and the spiritual recognition of unity. She provided accommodation for numerous guests, and realised the unity of man without extinguishing diversities. Accordingly, the records of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy did not represent the true history of India. Through all the fights and intrigues of her earlier history India stood aloof. "Her thrones were not her concern. They passed over her head like clouds." She let the legions thunder past and plunged in social reconciliation again.

It is to be noted that India's caste system was the outcome of the spirit of toleration, the urge for adjustment. India tried to avoid all friction, so she afforded each race, each class full freedom within her boundaries. It is true that India in trying to avoid collisions laid emphasis



on the law of heredity, ignoring the law of mutation, and “thus gradually reduced arts into crafts and genius into skill.” But like Europe, India refused to adopt the method—“either shut your doors against aliens or reduce them to slavery.” Tagore confessed that India had made grave errors in setting up the boundary walls too rigidly between races, in perpetuating in her classifications the results of inferiority. But for centuries she carried out new experiments and new adjustments. India unfortunately failed to continue the realisation that in human society “differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains, fixed for ever—they are fluid with life’s flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume.”<sup>1</sup> It is sad for humanity that “the West is continually producing mechanical power in excess of its spiritual control, and India has produced a system of mechanical control in excess of its vitality.”<sup>2</sup>

India knew that differences, where real, were to be accepted as objective realities; real unity was to be achieved not by extermination of all differences but by the toleration of those distinctive features within the bounds of adjustment. They could not be standardised in one pattern by force or through compulsion. The French Revolution of 1789 tried, but it failed; the Russian Revolution of 1917 sought to do it, but that was doomed to failure.<sup>3</sup> India’s *modus operandi* was different; she tried to regulate and discipline the different races, the different classes by according recognition to their distinctiveness and thereby achieving cohesion in society. India accepted all, bowed down to all, and recognised social and spiritual unity with one another. Hence, India is social, her religion is bound up with her society. Tagore, therefore, observed significantly :

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s *Nationalism*.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore’s *Creative Unity*, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Tagore’s *Bharat-barsha* (India) published in *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. 4, and *Russiar Chitti* (Letters from Russia).

"Our Indian civilisation is not bearing fruit through our negligence, but that civilisation is not dead for all purposes. The past tradition is baffling our efforts to imitate others. If we welcome anything new in scorn of our past traditions, the past will wreak vengeance on us, it will make the new impure and polluted. We may argue that there is need for the new approach, but if it is completely cut off from the past, we shall achieve nothing ; the call of necessity will not throw the door open. There must be adjustment between old and new, otherwise all efforts will run to waste. That was why that the past should be revived, resurrected. The noble ideas of ancient India which helped our forefathers to pray, to sacrifice, to work, must pervade our life, and they will obliterate all the hindrances that impede the meeting of the old and the new."<sup>1</sup>

According to the true Indian view, "the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realising our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy ; not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union."<sup>2</sup>

Tagore asked us not to forget that "Hindu civilisation was once very much alive, crossing the seas, planting colonies, giving to and taking from all the world. It had its arts, its commerce, its vast and strenuous field of work. The men of those days did not like marionettes play the same set piece over and over again. They progressed through mistakes, made discoveries through experiments, and gained truth from striving. They belonged to a free and varied *samaj*, quick with life, driven into ever new enterprise by its active vigour." Man shows his mental feebleness when he loses faith in the life which is mobile and active. The orthodox Indian of to-day refuses to accept that the real principle of life is to think and doubt, accept and reject, progress, change and evolve, and not to lie still under a mausoleum of inactivity.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Brahmin* (published in *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. 4).

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, p. 40.

Tagore in one of his famous essays<sup>1</sup> described the inner tendencies of Indian history ; he refused to accept lessons from Anglo-Indian historians that the real history of India was concerned with the wars, conquests, battles and dynastic intrigues and quarrels of rulers. It was his main thesis that the task of civilisation was to resolve the conflict that appeared on the scene at the various stages of history. This synthetic approach is the basis of all great civilisations ; where man fails to synthetise the differences, the contrary and contradictory forces, he goes down ; the civilisation of a particular country, in the absence of the vitalising forces of synthesis and harmony, hardens itself and meets its doom in the barren cage of inert construction.

Since India appeared on the stage of history, we find racial conflict between Aryans and non-Aryans. At the first onrush of the Aryan conquest, this conflict spread, and a wave of Aryan vanity and conceit swept the land. But Aryans did not enter India at one time ; they came in at different periods. The history of India exalts and extols the attempt at establishing the bridge of unity and harmony between the Aryan and the non-Aryan. The conflict very soon canalised itself in the task of realisation of spiritual unity between man and man. Tagore placed King Janak, Visvamitra and Ramachandra, chronicled in the Ramayana, as the three leaders in the task of reconciliation. In those days the Brahmin and the Kshatriya (the warrior race) were guided by different ideals. Every clan of the Aryan had its own leader, and prayers and rites were peculiar to every such clan-leader. The observances of all these various clans forming the Aryan group required specialised knowledge, and the Brahmin took to this profession—engaged sturdily in seeing to the observances of the rites of different clans. The Kshatriya (the noble knight), on the other hand, took to protecting the country,

<sup>1</sup> *Bharat-barshe Itihashe Dhara* (The Currents of History in India), written in 1918 B.S. (Rabindra-Rachanavali, Vol. 18).

carrying on war and preserving people from attacks. The Kshatriya thus engaged himself in winning laurels, in exerting his industry and in discovery of new weapons of protection, but the Brahmin busied himself in keeping unsullied the traditions and memorable events of the different clans. It is only natural that the flow of religious life of the nation gets obstructed, whenever such work is restricted to a particular section. Accordingly, at that time the meeting ground was Kshatriya society, as the Kshatriya was mobile, virile, and braving all obstacles in the path of progress. Those who stand united before the jaws of death cannot but overlook their differences with others. It was the Kshatriya who was forging the bond of unity. The Aryan was converging various members of the group into the centre of unity, and this gave them the training to proclaim that God was one, although in name and form He was many. Thus came the movement of unifying the various forms of worship as it was found that there was no ultimate gain in offering special prayers and special rites to please particular Gods. The Brahma was the God of the new movement. The Brahmin accepted the synthesis and gave full recognition to Vishnu. In ancient India two persons were recognised as incarnation of Vishnu ; they were Sree Krishna and Sree Ramachandra. Both of them were Kshatriyas. It is not to be ignored that the Brahmin and the Kshatriya met in the arena of conflict ; the synthesis emerged out of the conflict. The Vasistha-Visvamitra episode resulted from such conflict. Visvamitra sought to achieve power and was proud of it ; Vasistha was rudely smitten by that power. Vasistha was the leader of Brahmins, and Visvamitra the leader of Kshatriyas. In the Ramayana, Ramachandra who had his initiation to the spiritual life from Vasistha followed Visvamitra and sided with the new movement of synthesis by bridging the gulf between the Aryan and the non-Aryan. Ramachandra's bhakti-cult made him the friend of the depressed, God of the monkey and a friend of Bibhisan. He

did not exterminate his enemies, he made them his own. That was his pride and glory. He overcame all social restrictions, all traditional prohibitions ; he established the bridge of concord and harmony between the Aryan and the non-Aryan. He did not extend his conquests by sheer force of arms. In the South Ramachandra sowed the seeds of monotheistic cult founded on bhakti. The seed bore fruit after many years when the Shiva-cult of the South was submerged in the bhakti-cult. Tagore pointed out that when Ramachandra was building the bridge between India and Lanka, he was, in fact, reuniting the two shores. The recovery of Sita from Ravana, the demon of isolation, represented man's spiritual striving in the world. Sita is Religion, Wisdom, Health and Prosperity—Sita the beautiful, Sita the well-wishing mother of Humanity. In the great work of recovering Sita, every one dedicated himself.

Tagore, therefore, drew emphatic attention to the basic fact that we could not do justice to India unless it was recognised, fully and cordially, that Indian history was the record of the synthesis of the narrow distinctiveness and the wide universality of man. In ancient times, the Brahmin guarded man's instinct of self-preservation, whereas the Kshatriya took charge of man's self-expansion. The Brahmin obstructed the progress of the Kshatriya, but when the Kshatriya had taken society along the road to expansion in scorn of handicaps put forward by the Brahmin, it was the Brahmin who accepted the new order and established unison with the past. European historians have not understood the working of synthesis in Indian history ; they have characterised the Brahmin as clever, artful and self-centred. In those days the Brahmin and the Kshatriya represented the two forces of the same nation. It was true that the balance of social progress in India was disturbed and the ascendancy of the Brahmin established. It was not all due to the chicanery of the Brahmin. After the Buddhist period the foreign races that penetrated into

India gave a rude shock to Indian society. They were ideologically different ; there were credal differences ; they were ethnologically different ; they fell upon Indian society suddenly. Their foreign characteristics made the Brahmin much too careful ; they wanted to shield Indian society against this onslaught as it was apprehended that self-expansion on the basis of synthetising differences and harmonising conflict might throw them in the path of extinction. Naturally, they shrank back to the shell of inner fortress, surrounded by the wall of restrictions and prohibitions. It was all a matter of strategy, and in the attempt to restrict movements, they stopped the flow of life altogether. Self-protection was assumed to be of more importance than self-expansion ; hence, the flow of expansion lost its way in the blind valley of social restrictions and formal religion.

From a study of the Ramayana we find that Kshatriyas found a common meeting ground with non-Aryans. From the Mahabharata we gather that there was the mingling of blood and the mixing up of religion between Aryans and non-Aryans. Indian society expanded itself through cross-breeding in eugenics and religion. Union was cemented by accepting those who could not be abandoned. Manu's indictment against cross-breeds showed that the co-mingling of blood and religion between the Aryan and the non-Aryan was not accepted cordially, but the inevitable in history was acknowledged with grace. It was against this reactionary force represented by the Brahmin in the matter of cheerful acceptance of the expansion of society that two of India's Kshatriya kings—Buddha and Mahavira—appeared on the scene with tremendous force. They made the proclamation in ringing terms that “ religion is true, and not the social system ; man obtains liberation through the help of true religion and not through the observance of social customs ; true religion cannot accept as valid the spirit of exclusiveness that separates the one from the other.” For a long period in Indian history

these two powerful Kshatriya forces overpowered Brahminism to a considerable extent.

Tagore pointed out that this overpowering ascendancy of Kshatriya force and the consequential discomfiture of Brahminism for a considerable period in India's history were not, on a long view, suitable for the building up of national cohesion. The nation loses its balance when one part of it becomes much too powerful. That was why the Buddhist age, in fact, forged chains in the attempt to free society from all kinds of bondage. So long a wave of union between the Aryan and the non-Aryan was coursing through Indian history resulting in national solidarity; the opposition that was offered regulated excesses and disciplined loose practices; occasionally there was need to control the wave. Thus a great nation came into being, and there was intimate mingling and mixing between the Aryan and the non-Aryan. But underneath this happy union there must have been the accumulation of eddies and pebbles which in a later period obstructed the flow of life and enveloped Indian society with the suffocating mortar of passivity and inactivity; when the flood of Buddhist influence ebbed away, it was found that Indian society was broken up into fragments. The social organisation which sought to build up unity in the midst of diversity in races collapsed totally after the Buddhist age. "Buddhism has thus spoiled harmony in the attempt to establish unity. All the forces of disunity appeared on the scene uninterrupted—the garden was turned into a forest." It is not to be confused that Tagore was ever scornful of Buddhism. He knew that like the religion of the Upanishads, Buddhism generated two divergent currents: the one impersonal preaching the abnegation of self through discipline, and the other personal, preaching the cultivation of sympathy for all creatures. Buddhism could not find its reality in the emptiness of the truthless abyss.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, P. 71.

The chief contributory cause of the sudden collapse of Indian society and the emergence of reactionary Brahminism was that during the Buddhist period non-Aryans from outside India poured in and gained such an ascendancy that the symmetry and proportion of Indian society which were being maintained through regulated intercourse of the Aryan and the resident non-Aryan were upset and disturbed. As long as the Buddhist influence was in top form, these racial differences, the lack of harmony, did not and could not disfigure Indian society ; but when it declined, they appeared with their ferocious teeth and claws sucking the life-blood of social organism. In the flood-tide of Buddhism the doctrine of deliverance flourished which reached all mankind and released man's inner resources from neglect and self-insult. "It was the sudden discovery of a great mine of living wealth."<sup>1</sup> The Brahmin sect kept itself aloof from the main current, as it was on the Brahmin that the task of preservation of racial superiority of the Aryan depended. The other strata in society were submerged ; even the Kshatriya was more or less identified with people ; the Kshatriya mingled his blood freely with the non-Aryan through marriage. It explained why the majority of royal dynasties in India after the Buddhist period were not of Kshatriya origin. The Saka, the Hun, all these foreign non-Aryans entered India and found a welcome place in Indian society. This flood-tide reached the inner citadel of Indian society through the channel broadened by Buddhism. Very little opposition was offered, as Indian society was then weak in that respect. In this wise, through promiscuous mixing with the non-Aryan in all spheres, the balance in society could not be maintained, and it was then and then only that the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore brought out the essential unity between Buddhism and the religion of the Baul, an Indian folk religion flourishing in Bengal. In both these religions we find man's yearning for attaining the infinite worth of his individuality, not through any conventional valuation of society, but through his perfect relationship with truth.



Aryan nature asserted itself and tried to re-discover it again. Each individual has his self-love. But the Aryan in his social ideal tried to subordinate the pursuit of self-interest to the higher purpose of his nature—the higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help. The Aryan regulated passions and appetites for the harmonious development of man. The Aryan in his turn got a good deal from the non-Aryan, and this Hindu culture, this Hindu thought, this Hindu civilisation, is not the product of purely Aryan mind ; it is the progeny of the marriage between the Aryan mind and the non-Aryan culture. The Dravidian was not a metaphysician, but he dreamt, sang and built ; he was an artist flowing with urge for beauty and pulsating with creative instincts. The Aryan got all these from the non-Aryan. Shiva-cult in its ferocious aspect was essentially non-Aryan, but the Aryan mind achieved reconciliation amongst Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvar. The Aryan also accepted the matriarchal creed of the non-Aryan, and it was through this influence that Goddesses appeared in Hindu mythology. When all this task of reconciliation was achieved, the Aryan and the non-Aryan were equally powerful ; the respective differences were acknowledged and harmonised. When there is a fight between equals, the one is not disposed to show contempt to the other. Conflict thus brings about unity. But after the Buddhist age the Brahmin, guided by his instinct of self-preservation, thought that the best course would be to live within the imprisoned walls in the interests of Aryan solidarity. That was not the age of fighting against non-Aryans, as they had already entered into the recesses of Aryan society. It was a task of weeding them out if excesses were to be checked. This could only be done by cultivating hatred against the non-Aryan. It was a lesson in history that hatred, once indulged in, could undoubtedly banish so-called undesirables from the fold of a section, but it thereby infected the person, showing contempt and hatred, with smallness and meanness, and he could not but feel circumscribed

and insulated in his activities. That inevitable had happened. In the era self-expansion the hatred towards non-Aryans could not break up society into fragment, as both the parties being strong, humanity was not humbled and disgraced. In the surge of expansion all the morass of smallness was swept away. But in an era of self-contraction, this hatred hardened itself into formal separatism, widening the lacerated wounds inflicted by greed and selfishness. The contempt for the non-Aryan, as manifested in the Vedas, had a touch of manliness which could not do positive harm, but the contempt for the Sudra<sup>1</sup> as indicated in Manu-Samhita was born of cowardice and meanness. That is the inscrutable way of humanity all over the world. Whenever one section becomes all-powerful, whenever a particular section is without a rival and can carry on his masterful rule without interruption, then the flow of life loses its current in the whirlpool of formalism and restrictions. The abuses of power are bound to occur, as power corrupts if it is exercised by one section for a considerable period without healthy competition from others. The right to tyrannize is a poison; it is definitely corrosive when the master finds himself confronted with cowardice and meanness in every sphere of life.

History substantiates that the following are the chief causes of the decline of Buddhism :

(1) The loss of royal patronage. In the fourth century A.D. the Guptas rose to power and dominated nearly the whole of Northern India for two centuries. Since Asoka India did not know such a mighty Empire. That is, after the united Empire of the Nanda Kings and the Mauryas, it was the Guptas who established a strong

<sup>1</sup> The Sudra means the person who does not belong to the Aryan fold. Tagore emphasised that "the name Sudra symbolises a man who has no margin round him beyond his bare utility." The word denotes a classification which includes all naked machines. (Tagore's *Creative Unity*, P. 24).

Empire, and the Guptas helped the revival of Brahminical religion. The dynasties that succeeded the Guptas in Northern India were either Saivas or Vaishnavas. The patronage of Harshavardhana and the Pala Emperors could not inject new life into Buddhism. In the South, Brahminical religion flourished under the later Chalukyas, the later Pallavas and the later Hoysalas.

(2) The monasteries were the chief strongholds of Buddhism; the strength of Buddhism lay not in the mass of lay followers (like Jainism). These monasteries were destroyed by the Islamic invaders.

(3) Buddhism was swallowed up by Brahminical religion, and Buddha was proclaimed as the *avatar* of Vishnu.

(4) Buddhism was involved in, and associated with, degraded Tantrika beliefs and rituals, and thus it became extremely unpopular.

Historically, the Gupta age was the beginning of the evolution of synthetic Hinduism. The Puranas and the Smritis were active efforts at reconciliation and harmony between orthodox and sectarian forms of Brahminical religion. The theological conception of *Trimurti* (that is, the manifestation of the Supreme God in three forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva) and the proclamation of the essential unity of the six systems of Hindu philosophy brought about a spirit of cohesion amongst the Hindus. All this was strategically done in order to vindicate Brahminical religion and to rescue the masses from the liberalising influence of Buddhism and Jainism.

After the downfall of the Gupta Empire, no such united kingdom could be established. For a time there was a triangular contest (750 to 950 A.D.) amongst the Rashtrakutas, the Palas of Bengal and the Gurjara-Pratiharas of Rajputana and Kanauj to establish an Empire, but the result was that energies were exhausted paving the way for the successful raids of Sultan Mahmud (1000-1030 A.D.) resulting in the Muslim conquest of the Punjab. We meet

with the next united Empire when the Turkish Sultans of Delhi conquered the whole of India.

It will remain an interesting question in history how with the next united Empire when the Turkish Sultans of under the patronage of Emperor Asoka (270-230 B.C.) was swept away. Buddhism spread to Burma, Ceylon, Alexandria, China, Korea and Japan. Its decline in India was hastened by the strategy of the advocates of Brahminical religion. Foreign races who invaded India during 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. largely adopted Buddhism. The need of presenting Buddhism in a form which would appeal to the uncivilised races and foreigners was felt, and many of their superstitious rites and practices had to be tolerated. The Mahayanist developed a flexible attitude, and the Mahayana form of Buddhism (regarding Buddha as a God evolving a pantheon of gods and goddesses) broke away from the Hinayana ideal of Buddhism which was formulated in the Pali canon and known as earlier Buddhism. The later Buddhism had developed doctrines, similar to Brahminical religion, and lost its way in Brahminical cults.

Before the Buddhist age the Brahmin and the Kshatriya were the two rival forces; society found harmony in the conflict. But after the Buddhist age the Kshatriya ceased from acting vigorously—the non-Aryan force came into conflict with Brahminism. Brahminism grew reactionary, the work of reconciliation was held up. The Rajput who represented the then Kshatriya force of India did not employ his genius for reconciliation in society on the pattern of the ancient Kshatriya; rather the Rajput kings helped the reactionary forces of Brahminism and thereby impeded the flow of harmony which was the peculiarity of mobile Indian society. The Rajput fell a victim to the wiles of the reactionary Brahmin in the matter of moulding society on the basis of separatist tendencies. Vital cracks, therefore, appeared in the facade of Hindu civilisation which was the offspring of Aryan and non-Aryan culture. Thus the path of expansion was definitely

blocked, and the instinct of self-preservation goaded them into the by-lane of self-extinction. In spite of great difficulties in the march of history, the lamp of real India has not failed to flicker now and then. "She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis has come through our saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, preaching one God to all races of India." India, even in her fallen days, has refused to accept the position that the idolatry of sectionalism is better than reverence for humanity. This fight against idolatry is still continuing; this battle against formalism, listlessness and passivity is being carried on by savants at different stages of history. Tagore himself devoted all his efforts to the task of fighting reactionary forces in politics, in society. Tagore has never believed that India whose treasures are the Upanishads, the Geeta, the Buddhist cult, and whose fighters are Sree Krishna and Sree Ramachandra (chronicled in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*) cannot for ages remain caged up in the formal and ritual religion that nurses the spirit of exclusiveness. This is not her conviction, not her spirit, not her message; it is a poisonous growth foreign to her nature, although it is being scrupulously guarded in the well of reactionarism which stifles growth, which caricatures the ideal of humanity in the name of sordid selfish interests. This suffocating period must go if India is to attain her full manhood and to justify her own Hindu civilisation rich with creative marks of reconciliation. How to do it in the teeth of the drainage of life-blood by social parasitism and the economic dragoons is the task set before us. Tagore was optimist, and he gave a call to his countrymen "to try to adopt the world power to guide our history to its own perfect end." His belief in humanity, faith in the human soul and yearning for internationalism never taught him that the goal could be achieved by ignoring the work of reconciliation in his own country, in Indian society.

“Civilisation is a kind of mould that each nation is busy making for itself to shape its men and women according to its best ideal.”<sup>1</sup> These distinctive ideals of all nations must be developed without destroying the link of co-operation between man and man, the nation and the nation. There can be no self-expression if all nations are repressed and standardised into one pattern on compulsion. Man must realise his individuality and wholeness of his existence. But Tagore was not a mere dreamer ; he wanted that the East must find her balance in science. The East relied solely upon her wings to cross the trackless infinite, but she spurned the Earth. Buffeted by storms her wings are hurt. She sorely needs help.

According to Tagore, the principle of work, in the evolving history of India, was not the ultimate glorification of this or that race ; in India the history of humanity was seeking to elaborate a special ideal, to give to general perfection a special form which should be for the gain of all humanity. Every race shall have to submerge the aggressive part of its individuality ; if any particular race arrogate to itself an undue predominance, that will interfere with the general progress. “The section which is unable or unwilling to adapt itself to the entire scheme, but struggles to keep up a separate existence, will have to drop out and be lost, sooner or later. And the component which realising its dedication to the ultimate ideal, acknowledges its own individual unimportance, will lose only its pettiness and find permanence for its greatness in that of the whole.” Tagore, therefore, warned his countrymen in the following way<sup>2</sup> :

“If we do not fit ourselves to play our part, it is we who shall have to go. If we stand aloof from the rest, in the pride of past achievement, content with heaping up obstacles around ourselves, God will punish us, either by afflicting us with sorrow unceasing till

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the authorised translation of Tagore's writing in Bengali in 1909-10 on *East and West*,

He has brought us to a level with the rest, or by casting us aside as mere impediments. If we insist on segregating ourselves in our pride of exclusiveness, fondly clinging to the belief that Providence is specially concerned in our own particular development; if we persist in regarding our dharma as ours alone, our institution as specially fit only for ourselves, our place of worship as requiring to be carefully guarded against all incomers, our wisdom as dependent for its safety on being locked up in our strong rooms; then we shall simply wait, in the prison of our own contriving, for the execution of the death sentence which in that case the world of humanity will surely pronounce against us."

Tagore's interpretation of Indian history, detailing the rise and fall of Hindu society, is found to be defective to Marxists, as he ignored the basic principles of historical materialism which states that "no type of social structure ever perishes until there have been developed all the productive forces for which it has room; and new and higher forces of production never appear on the scene until the material conditions of existence requisite for their development have matured within the womb of the old society." But it is a historical fact that all societies do not go the same way, and in some the influences of geographical environments weigh more and in others the influences of peculiar conditions of existence exercise their ascendancy. Tagore believed that historical causes, geographical environments, material conditions of existence, all gave distinct appearances to the new social relations. He interpreted the history of India accordingly without giving predominating emphasis on the productive forces of society. Tagore referred to the peculiarities in the Indian civilisation, the product of both matter and mind, shaped by social forces and individual bent. Tagore, in his own way, tried to show the way to the understanding of the Indian puzzle. It is to be taken note of that, according to Tagore, Man is both biased and unbiased and that all creations are the representations of facts and ideas. The scientific mind is unbiased, but the artistic mind is biased. The moral side of man is in the control of desire and the training of

unselfishness ; the spiritual side represents sympathy and love. The scientific and artistic minds, the moral and spiritual aspects, all should be taken together, and both have influences on the shaping of history. The completeness of reality consists in the endless contradiction of what does exist and what should exist. That was why Tagore found the consciousness of a large multitude illumined with the teachings of creative men, and he interpreted history accordingly. He believed that all the great civilisations that had become extinct must have come to their end through wrong expression of humanity, through parasitism on a gigantic scale bred by wealth, by man's clinging reliance on material resources, through a scoffing spirit of denial, of negation, robbing us of our means of sustenance in the path of truth.<sup>1</sup>

### THE HINDU TRADITION

Maurice Bloomfield points out that "ancient India has no history in the ordinary sense, no secular history. In lieu thereof the history of its religion and the history of its institutions are unrivalled among the peoples of olden times in their continuity and their completeness. Especially the obscurer and the more sluggish currents of ordinary daily life, a knowledge of which is so important for the true estimate of a people, are laid bare to the eye of the historian by an altogether unusual kind of tradition. The beliefs of the folk did not for ever flow in a separate undercurrent beneath the open-air religion, scorned by the latter as superstition, but they were at an early time embedded within the religion." That was the merit of the age when Indian civilisation was under the influence of the Rigveda, Samveda and Yajurveda. Before Buddha everything was saturated with Brahminical spirit under the mighty influence of the priest. Priestly influence was reduced by Buddhism. It is to be noted that the Atharva-

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on *The Meaning of Art*.



veda (recognised as the fourth Veda) “leads us out of the great theosophic and philosophical conceptions and makes us enter into the stir of the everyday life of the court, the middle class and the common folk.” The priest was not absent from the Atharvaveda, but he was in touch with the lay classes. The Atharvaveda is “a document of priceless value for the institutional history of India as well as the ethnological history of the human race,” and the Rigveda is a document of the history of mythology and formal priestly religion. The Atharvan philosophical hymns teem with dynamical principles, and they constitute the bridge between the philosophical attempts of the Rigveda and the speculative flights of the Upanishads. The Atharvaveda belonged to Kshatriyas, and the triumph of the Atharvaveda was in a sense a kind of synthesis in the struggle of Kshatriyas against the hieratic formalism of the Brahminic cult revealed in the Rigveda. It is not to be forgotten that the treatises called Brahmanas (which are appended to the four Vedas) are “the genuine expression of the thoughts and doings of the priesthood.” Priests generally represent in society the static, conservative principle; they are the natural enemies of thinkers; they avoid new paths and bold experiments; they seek to consolidate traditional rights and observances. Religion in their hands becomes a cult. In the Brahmana period, sacrificial practice was emphasised, and priests found easy livelihood in it. All over the world, the greater number of people are averse to reasoning, and they find it much more comfortable “to let thought sleep on the soft cushion of crystalised customs.” Indians, being the most religiously minded people in the world, may by false religion be dragged to extreme abjection. It has been found that the Indian gives a continual evidence of two extremes—the lowest and blindest idolatry, and the noblest soaring towards the true God. In the Rigveda and still more in the Atharvaveda, there are documents of lay and rational thought. Prof. Carlo Formichi rightly pointed out:

“Even if we were lacking the precious testimony of the

Rigvedic and Atharvan philosophical hymns, we should have been driven to conjecture that behind the priests there was a class of persons hardly inclined to take for granted all that they said, and who were preparing for new religious and philosophical conquests. Otherwise, we could not account for the stupendous outburst of speculation that we find in the Upanishads and, still more in Buddhism. Great spiritual conceptions, as well as great political and social reforms, are always the offspring of a slow centennial evolution, and they never spring up like mushrooms."

All literary documents of ancient India were the output of the Brahminical class. Priestcraft became easily popular. But in the Rigveda, the Atharvaveda, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads, one does meet with the dynamic element in Indian development. There were crafty Brahmins leading the country on to the blind channel of rites and observances, but "the destiny of human thought is always in the hands of a few individuals." Thought is of the nature of fire ; a single spark is enough to set ablaze a whole wood. Tagore in the analysis of Indian history had shown that in spite of whimsical symbols and absurd ceremonies of Vedic religion, society progressed through active synthesis, and it was after the Buddhist period that Brahmins rose in "the almightiness of rites," within the narrow region of class ascendancy. The tolerance of the Brahmin was only exhausted when Buddha was out to preach that "we are lacking of an ego." It was opposed as heretical. Buddhism was concentrated in the great monasteries whereas Hinduism was spread over the country. So Buddhism could not withstand the assimilative influence of the Brahmin or the violence of the Muslim. After the Buddhist period logic ceased to be the preponderant impulse either in the spiritual or in the active life of man. This unreasoned living and unreasoning mind dominate the Indian society of to-day. Depressed by this degeneration Tagore sent out his prayer from the well of his heart for the purification of his country:

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high ;  
Where knowledge is free ;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by  
 narrow domestic walls ;  
 Where words come out from the depth of truth ;  
 Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection ;  
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into  
 the dreary desert sand of dead habit ;  
 Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening  
 thought and action—  
 Into the heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country  
 awake.” (*Gitanjali*)

Tagore's position was this. India had a *Sadhana* of her own, and it belonged to her innermost heart. Throughout all her political vicissitudes its stream had flowed on. If we could visualise the historical development of her *Sadhana*, we should discover where the living history of India exists.

In the social idealism of the Vedic age there was an instinctive longing for unity. That was India's mission. The sages saw the need of unity, and the following occurs in the Atharvaveda :

“ Give us agreement with our own,  
 With strangers give us unity,  
 Do ye, o Asvins, in this place  
 Join us in sympathy and love.  
 May we agree in mind, agree in purpose,  
 Let us not fight against the heavenly light,  
 Around us rise no din of frequent slaughter,  
 Nor Indra's arrow fly, for day is present.”

The inter-connection of the whole universe is emphasised in the Rigveda :

“ Earth bearing folk of many a varied language,  
 With divers rites as suit their dwelling places,  
 Pour like a constant cow that never faileth  
 A thousand streams of treasure to enrich us.  
 Produced from thee, on thee move mortal creatures,  
 Thou hast both quadruped and biped.  
 Thine are, Prithvi, these five human races,  
 For whom, though mortal, the sun, as he rises,  
 Spreads with his rays the light that is immortal,—  
 In consort may these creatures yield us blessing.”

Hindu humanism appealed to Tagore. In ancient India it

was free for every man, whether king or peasant, to follow his own dharma. Hindu idealists were intolerant of social injustice. They observed: "To be a frog in the mud is far better, an insect in dirt, a snake in lightless cave, but never (under) man's injustice."

All these ideas influenced Tagore considerably. Tagore in his interpretation found that "the history of India had been standing stagnant for a long time, giving up in weariness of spirit all independent seeking of truth, all adventures of life, even the initiating of intelligent operations for its internal and external cleansing; venerating its own deterioration, it had ceased from attempting any readjustment with the changing ages. One by one, almost all the lights of its life had become dimmed through poverty of food, poverty of health and poverty of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> According to Tagore, "man's defeat comes when its own will abdicates and some external will occupies the vacant throne, when his personal intelligence retires and he clings as a parasite to some foreign intelligence, be it borrowed from his own dead past, or imposed upon him from the present of some stranger nation. That is man's defeat when the activities of the spirit are arrested and when he blindly goes on turning the wheels of the machine of habit, fashioned through a succession of centuries—when he ignores reason and accepts authority, when he lowers the dignity of his innate informing principle and exalts external observances."<sup>2</sup> It was a tragedy that for ages "the major part of India had been sunk in self-abasement through an unashamed acknowledgment of inferior rights for the multitude in religion and in social affairs, rendering its people unfit for the difficult responsibilities of self-expression."

Tagore believed and preached that "formalism in religion is like nationalism in politics; it breeds sectarian

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's address on Rammohun Roy on the occasion of the Brahmo Samaj Centenary.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

ignorance, mutual misunderstanding and a spirit of persecution.”<sup>1</sup> The Indian society being ridden by formalism in religion, we cannot expect anything but conflicts in the meeting of the East and the West. The cry of the modern age, according to Tagore, is for the vindication of faith in the unity of man. India has remained indifferent to the cry because “an emaciation of human nature has already been going on for a long time in India.” We need in India more fulness of life, and not asceticism, because “deadness, in all forms, gives rise to impurities, by enfeebling our reason, narrowing our vision, creating fanaticism, owing to our will-power being forced into abnormal channels.” The West is indifferent to the cry of the age because man’s personality is reduced to a machine. It is altogether wrong to think that India stood still for uncounted centuries. In the great days of Hindū civilisation it was quick with life, pregnant with creative ideals. There was progress without impairing continuity with the past. The Upanishads superseded the ceremonial religion of the Vedas. The spiritual movement of the Upanishads losing its way in dogmatic controversies, Buddhism prescribed simplicity of truth and moral law, and the Bhagavadgita broke open the walls of scholasticism. When ritualists were covering religion with rigid creeds, the Saiva and the Vaishnava saints, and Sankara and Ramanuja called on the people to the worship of the living God. Then the benign influence of Madhva and Chaitanya, Basava and Ramananda, Kabir and Nanak kept alive the free spirit of religion and prevented the country from lapsing into a spiritual flagging leading to inactivity and meaningless rites. “Hinduism is a movement, not a position ; a process, not a result ; a growing tradition, not a fixed revelation.”<sup>2</sup> Tagore was pained to find, in his interpretation of Indian history, that we had lost the true vision of Hinduism ignoring the law

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, December 20, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *The Hindu View of Life* by Sir S. Radhakrishnan, p. 129.

of growth and the inner work of readjustment which were in evidence in the creative Hindu epochs. The wood that is dead and diseased is to be cleared away. It is to be recognised that "the institution appropriate and wholesome for one stage of human development becomes inadequate and even dangerous when another stage has been reached." Vedic religion was transformed into a theistic religion through the synthesis in the contact of Vedic Aryans with Dravidians; the reform movements of Ramananda, Chaitanya, Kabir and Nanak flowed from the stimulus of Islam; the Brahmo-Samaj and the Arya-Samaj movements of the nineteenth century were the outcome of the contact with Western influences. There is thus "the dialectic of religious advance through tradition, logic and life." "We rise from life to thought and return from thought to life in a progressive enrichment which is the attainment of ever higher levels of reality . . . . Though Hindu religious thought has traversed many revolutions and made great conquests, the essential ideas have continued the same for four or five millenniums."<sup>1</sup>

With Tagore true India was an idea, not a mere geographical expression. India has ever nourished faith in the truth of the spiritual man. To realise this truth India has made in the past innumerable experiments, sacrifices and penances. India will be triumphant when this idea wins victory—the idea of the Infinite Personality, whose light reveals itself through the obstruction of darkness. This darkness of egoism results in the egoism of the nation. The ideal of India is against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others. Tagore's religion had been the triumph of the universal human spirit over the individual being of the super-personal man. His prayer was: "let India stand for the co-operation of all peoples of the world." This was the theme of his Hibbert Lectures which appeared as *The Religion of Man*.

Tagore proclaimed in despair that India was not finding

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

her proper place in the influencing of world thought and action. He observed :

“ We in India are unfortunate in not having the chance to give expression to the best in us in creating intimate relations with the powerful nations, whose preparations are all leading to an enormous waste of resources in a competition of brow-beating and bluff. Some great voice is waiting to be heard which will usher in the sacred light of truth in the dark hours of the nightmare of politics, the voice which will proclaim that God is over all, and exhort us never to covet, to be great in renunciation that gives us the wealth of spirit, strength of truth, leads us from the illusion of power to the fullness of perfection, to the *Sāntam*, who is peace eternal, to the *Advaitam*, who is the infinite one in the heart of the manifold. But we in India have not yet had the chance. Yet we have our own human voice which truth demands.”<sup>1</sup>

It is to be acknowledged that history is a chronicle of the man's attempt to solve the problem of living. But civilisation is not essentially based on plants giving high yields of storable food and animals carrying loads and pulling carts and ploughs, but also on men who move human actions with their shaking ideas. It is not a fallacy to regard history as “ the story of great men and movements’.” Prof. J. B. S. Haldane represents a narrow school which believes that the world has been shaken, and not moved, by the dreamer of dreams. To quote his words, “ the men who did most to solve it (the practical problem of living) were not those who thought about it, or talked about it, or impressed their contemporaries, but those who silently and efficiently got on with their work.” The problem of living with Tagore was much more wide, and accordingly history was interpreted by him with due emphasis on the inner ideals of society. Tagore may, however, be criticised as having given importance to the kernel without adequate valuation of the outer shell, and this partiality is due to the fact that our historians are concerned with non-essential historical factors—they talk neither of men who think nor of men who work but of men who inherit rank and wealth.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's address at Manchester College, Oxford, May 1930 (Published in the Appendix of *The Religion of Man*).

## CHAPTER III

### THE APPROACH TO POLITICS

The political thought of Tagore is little known, less understood in our country. The chief reason is that Tagore is not a politician in its technical and professional sense ; he is a political thinker. As a poet of patriotism, a prophet of nationalism, and a lover of humanity, he is widely known. But his political thought has not attracted due attention, because he could not and did not found any particular political school or a political party for seizure of power or for the pooling of national energies in furtherance of an agitational programme. Tagore moved on and on ; he had never stopped in the interests of a particular cult, nor did he propose to set up a school of his own in vindication of his doctrines. He administered rebukes ; he hurled criticisms ; he propounded his philosophy of practical humanism based on the rock of inter-dependence of the world ; he set up life-giving ideals before his countrymen ; he propagated nationalism in the context of internationalism. But his dynamic philosophy did not allow him to know rest and to found political parties on the basis of accepted canons of statecraft and diplomacy. Tagore left his impress in the field of thought ; he did not seek to prescribe shortcuts to the success of political manoeuvres.

Truth requires it to be stated that Tagore has definite political speculations which are rich, multicoloured, systematised and unconventional, and they call for serious attention in the perspective of world thought. He has made constructive contributions to our political thought, although we happen to ignore them. It is not an easy task to analyse and investigate the political thought of Tagore—the more so when Tagore's literature is vast and many-sided. The profundity of his thought often defies analysis ; the broad canvas of his writings increases manifold the



responsibilities of weighing his political philosophy. But unless the fundamentals of his thought are clearly grasped, the reader is bound to lose his way in the mazes of his analytic writings. There is unity in his thought, however multi-coloured it may look ; he is ever-changing without being contradictory. He holds fast to the doctrine of movement ; he steps forward and grows without losing continuity. Hence, his approach is living, moving and progressive.

Goethe truly described the role of the Poet in the realm of politics when he said that "the poet as a man and a citizen will love his native land, but the native land of his genius lies in the world of goodness, greatness and beauty, a country without frontiers or boundaries, ready for him to seize and shape whenever he finds it. His gaze is like the eagle's, poised far above the lands, pouncing on the hare whether it cowers in Saxony or in Prussia." What better could Tagore do all his life than "to try to combat pernicious prejudice, open the narrow heart and enlighten the spirit of his people, purifying their taste and ennobling their thought ?" What better service could he render than to leave his political teachings in the armoury of his countrymen without joining and founding a Party ? Tagore believed that men were united by principles but divided by opinions ; he was concerned with principles. It is not true that Tagore exhausted himself like the irresponsible butterfly in translating all the festive colours of creation in the vibration of his verses ; he imprisoned himself in the interminable coils of duty to the country and service to humanity.

To understand and appreciate the political teachings of Tagore it is necessary to know that there were two competing and conflicting ideological currents in Bengal in the nineteenth century. Raja Rammohun Roy initiated an era of liberalism and proclaimed that life was a continual process of synthesis. There was another conservative current losing its way in the stagnant pool of orthodox

Hinduism. Tagore was the lineal descendant of Raja Rammohun in the fundamental approach to the problems of the age. The impetuous onrush of Western civilisation flooded Bengal in the nineteenth century ; the rule of Bengal by a commercial corporation like the East India Company even in the eighteenth century was, in fact, a rule by the British Parliament, and it was thoroughly consolidated by Bengal's men and money. Notwithstanding the suicidal effects of foreign rule, foreign culture and foreign enterprise, Tagore did, and could, carve out his own path through a continual process of synthesis. He, therefore, stood for the vindication of man ; the hindrances thereto were to be eradicated. The profiteer's bushel, the foreign exploitation, the soulless character of British administration, the vulgarisation of man's higher nature, aggressive nationalism in scorn of the welfare of fellow-creatures, the blind and insensate patriotism choking the springs of human civilisation—all these which hide the light of truth were severely criticised by Tagore. His political ideals were influenced by the principles of humanism. Tagore was not a professional politician, but he had been undoubtedly the effective political force in fashioning modern India. He wanted freedom for his countrymen from fear, shaped by their own distorted dreams ; freedom from the burden of ages which " blind their eyes to the beckoning call of future " ; freedom from the insult of dwelling in a doll's world " where movements are started through brainless wires " ; and freedom from the anarchy of a destiny " whose sails are weakly yielded to blind uncertain winds."

### TAGORE'S DIALECTICS

Dialectics is stated to be the algebra of revolution. If dialectics "is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought," Tagore's approach was indeed revolutionary. Life is not Formal Logic ; it unfolds itself in the process of

time through various manifestations ; it has no end, no finality, no deadening block ; it rolls on and on, and carries on ceaseless existence. Similar is the case with nature, society and human thought. Tagore proclaims that nature expresses itself through various forms, and the so-called decay is simply a stage for new forms. Accordingly, nothing was extinct to him, as it was simply a change over from one form to the other. Nature, life, thought, all is an endless process of continuity ; it changes and takes different forms, as reality is conceived as dynamic. This is more in tune with Hegel's dialectics, as the whole evolution was on the plane of Idea ; it has no touch of Marx's dialectical materialism, as with Tagore ideas are prior to things. The underlying forces of history, with Tagore, were ideas and ideals and not the power of production. True that man is a food-seeking apparatus, but his realisation comes from self-knowledge. Here his self is not the ego but the "divine" in man. There is no metaphysics in it ; it is the basic principle on which Tagore took his stand and proclaimed that human beings were sons of the Immortal One, and that "know thyself" was the *summum bonum* of his existence. The evolution of ideologies in history can be traced from the "unity of man with man," and man is the starting point of Tagore's thought process. This emphasis on "human essence" was the base of Tagore's dynamic view of society.

"The flower sheds all its petals and finds the fruit," said Tagore, because he was intensely a believer in the law of motion. His dialectics taught him that "all man is marching from epoch to epoch towards the fullest realisation of his soul—the soul which is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds; the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution." Man is out to find himself. Tagore definitely believed that man was indeed abroad to satisfy needs, more vital than food and clothing. He thereby discarded the materialist conception of history

which declared that "the ultimate causes of all social changes, and political revolutions are to be sought, not in the minds of men, in their increasing insight into eternal truth and justice, but in the changes in the mode of production and exchange."<sup>1</sup> Tagore's approach was, however, different from the Marxist. According to Tagore, the great revolution in human history starts "whenever the individual tries to dam the ever-flowing current of the world-force and imprison it within the area of his particular use." "Whenever the part, spurning the whole, tries to run a separate course of its own, the great pull of the all gives it a violent wrench, stops it suddenly, and brings it to the dust." In other words, "the boundary walls of our individuality thrust us back within our limits, on the one hand, and thus lead us, on the other, to the unlimited. Only when we try to make those limits infinite are we launched into an impossible contradiction and court miserable failure." But with the Marxist, the contradiction appears when the monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with and under it. "Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder."<sup>2</sup> The Marxist definitely holds that "the material life of society, its being, is primary, and its spiritual life secondary, derivative, and that the material life of society is an objective reality existing independently of the will of men, while the spiritual life of society is a reflection of this objective reality, a reflection of being."<sup>3</sup> Tagore believed in the duality of self. In the region of our physical nature we have one set of desires—these desires are self-centred; they are concerned with the respective impulses. Apart from fulfilment of our bodily desires, there is the demand of the

<sup>1</sup> F. Engels' *Anti-Duhring*.

<sup>2</sup> Marx's *Capital*, Vol. I.

<sup>3</sup> Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

soul. Utility can never occupy our whole being ; what is useful only touches us at the point where we have some want. "The passage of our self is through its self-hood which is independent, to its attainment of soul, which is harmonious." "There is the self which displays itself, there is the self which transcends itself. To display itself it tries to stand upon the pedestal of its accumulations ; to reveal itself it gives up every thing it has."<sup>1</sup> "When we look at the world through the veil of our desires we make it small and narrow, and fail to perceive its full truth. Of course it is obvious that the world serves us and fulfils our needs, but our relation to it does not end there. We are bound to it with a deeper and truer bond than that of necessity. Our soul is drawn to it ; our love of life is really our wish to continue our relation with this great world. This relation is one of love. . . . In love all contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love are unity and duality not at variance. Love must be one and two at the same time. Only love is motion and rest in one. In love, loss and gain are harmonised."<sup>2</sup> Tagore quoted the seer-poet who sang : "From love the world is born, by love it is sustained, towards love it moves, and into love it enters." But it must not be confused that when Tagore recognised the force of love, he ever discarded the principle of harmony of the two contradictory forces. It is the very contradiction, the finger striking the strings, that produces music. "When only one predominates, there is the sterility of silence." So he did not discard force, but we must not abuse force and ignore love. "When love and force do not go together, then love is mere weakness and force is brutal. Peace becomes death when it is alone. War becomes a demon when it destroys its mate."<sup>3</sup>

Tagore accepted the science of the general laws of

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Sadhana*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 112 and p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Tagore's letter to C. F. Andrews, August 7, 1915.

motion and development of nature, human society and thought. Tagore's dialectical method was cased in an idealistic shell. Tagore believed that we should have to overcome evils and that an imperfection must go through perpetual realisation. This life-process is going on, so he said :

"Our life is facing the infinite, and it is in movement. Its aspiration is therefore infinitely more than its achievement, and as it goes on it finds that no realisation of truth ever leaves it stranded on the desert of finality, but carries it to a region beyond. Evil cannot altogether arrest the course of life on the highway and rob it of its possessions. For the evil has to pass on, it has to grow into good ; it cannot stand and give battle to the All. If the least evil could stop anywhere indefinitely, it would sink deep and cut into the very roots of existence."<sup>1</sup>

That was why Tagore believed that "truth is beyond logic ; it is the ever-lasting miracle ; it is static and dynamic at the same time ; it is false and real ; it is finite and infinite ."<sup>2</sup>

Tagore explained it further :

"The current of the world has its boundaries, otherwise it could have no existence, but its purpose is not shown in the boundaries which restrain it, but in its movement, which is towards perfection. . . . Man has found out the great paradox that what is limited is not imprisoned within its limits ; it is ever moving, and therewith shedding its finitude every moment. In fact, imperfection is not a negation of perfectness ; finitude is not contradictory to infinity ; they are but completeness manifested in parts, infinity revealed within bounds."<sup>3</sup>

This was Tagore's philosophy, a projection of "the Idea" of Hegel, founded on the bed-rock principles of the Upanishads. Tagore's "negation of the negation" took a peculiar line, as with him aspiration was more than an achievement. Tagore felt that the highest joy of man was in the losing of our egoistic self and in uniting with others. When we live in the shell of self, it is not possible for us to realise truth. "Come out, come away,"—this is the

<sup>1</sup> *Sadhana*, P. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, August 7, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> *Sadhana*, Pp. 47-48.

urgent cry we have in our soul—the cry in the blood of the chick, living in its shell. It is not merely truth that faces us, but freedom that gives us truth. Buddha, therefore, dwelt on the importance of freeing our lives from trammels of self.<sup>1</sup> Tagore developed his thesis significantly when he said<sup>2</sup> :

“The chick knows when it breaks through the self-centred isolation of its egg that the hard shell which covered it so long was not really a part of its life. That shell is a dead thing ; it has no growth, it affords no glimpse whatever of the vast beyond that lies outside it. However pleasantly perfect and rounded it may be, it must be given a blow to, it must be burst through and thereby the freedom of light and air be won, and the complete purpose of bird life be achieved.”

This re-birth from the blind envelopment of self to the freedom of soul life was the change ; here it was the negation, as it could come into living relation with his surroundings. But there may not be need for “ the negation of negation,” because the original position with qualitative changes is not often reached. Tagore had no faith in the immutable social system because he believed that stagnation and institutionalism would make us mere creatures of self, “ the self that is unyielding and narrow, that reflects no light, that is blind to the infinite.” It is for our self to know that it must be born anew every moment of its life. It must break off its career of separateness. The self has ceaselessly to cast off its limits, its separateness which envelops it again and again. “ It strikes its banks to realise anew every moment that it has its unending opening towards the sea.” “ It is as a poem that strikes its metre at every step not to be silenced by its rigid regulations, but to give expression every moment to the inner freedom of its harmony.” Tagore’s incessant cry was : “ I must come out from the life of habit, the life of compromises, the life of self.” Tagore laid emphasis on the journey

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, October 12, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Sadhana*, P. 30.

of self to soul, because he believed in the universality and individuality of self. Hence, he could not seek the laws of history of society "in the mode of production practised by society in any given historical period." He put it in his own inimitable way<sup>1</sup> :

"At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below. Its strength lies in its being held firm in the clasp of the comprehensive world, and in the fullness of its community with all things. But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravitation of all things. It is small in appearance but great in reality. For it holds its own against the forces that would rob it of its distinction and make it one with the dust."

This is the superstructure of the self, proud of its isolation, and anxious to merge in the infinite. Tagore believed in "a constant striving and suffering for us to maintain the separateness of this self of ours." "The aspect of man which has surpassed the animal grows with its ideal. It is an aspiration for that which is not evident in his material world nor urgent for his physical life, it belongs to his universal self."<sup>2</sup>

To understand Tagore and Marx, it is relevant to know the principal features of the Marxist dialectical method which are as follows :

1. It holds that no phenomenon in nature can be understood if taken by itself, isolated from surrounding phenomena.

2. It requires that phenomena should be considered not only from the stand-point of their inter-connection and inter-dependence, but also from the stand-point of their

<sup>1</sup> *Sadhana*, P. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's *Man*, P. 2.



movement, their change, their development, their coming into being and going out of being.

3. It holds that the process of development should be understood not as a movement in a circle; but as an onward and upward movement, as a transition from an old qualitative state to a new qualitative state.

4. It holds that the process of development from the lower to the higher takes place not as a harmonious unfolding of phenomena, but as a disclosure of the contradictions inherent in things and phenomena.

Judged by these tests Tagore's dialectical method is analytical, and the synthesis of the subjective and the objective outlook is also to be taken note of. Dialectical materialism is materialistic in so far as it defines the central problem of modern society as a material problem. With Tagore, "thought is the subject and being is the predicate." Tagore's dialectical method was opposed to the metaphysical method, because he did not observe natural objects and natural processes in their isolation. He had not the metaphysical mode of outlook which observed things and ideas not in their motion but in their repose. It is the metaphysical outlook which sooner or later lapses into "pale, immobile, supine abstraction." Tagore was not guilty of it; he was not indifferent to the laws of social dynamics.

Tagore believed that what was limited was not imprisoned within its limits; it was ever moving, and therewith shedding its finitude every moment. The current of the world has its boundaries, but its purpose is not shown in the boundaries which restrain it, but in its movement. In this view of the problem, Tagore interpreted the significance of freedom, of what perfect freedom meant.

What does freedom mean? It is freedom from the isolation of self, from the isolation of things, which imparts a fierce intensity to our sense of possession. Freedom is not the mere negation of bondage. Tagore believed that freedom in the mere sense of independence had no content, and therefore no meaning. "Perfect freedom lies in a per-

fect harmony of relationship.” In the social or the political field, the lack of freedom is based upon the spirit of alienation. It is a misunderstanding of the world’s process if one imagines that an individual who succeeds in dissociating himself from his fellows attains real freedom. Rampant individualism is, according to Tagore, against what is truly human ; it belongs to the primitive poverty of the animal life ; it is the confinement of a cramped spirit, of restricted consciousness. There must be a tie of relationship which undoubtedly implies obligations to others. Tagore, therefore, observed<sup>1</sup> :

“It is true that in the human world only a perfect arrangement of inter-dependence gives rise to freedom. The most individualistic of human beings who own no responsibility are the savages who fail to attain their fullness of manifestation. They live immersed in obscurity, like an ill-lighted fire that cannot liberate itself from its envelope of smoke. Only those may attain their freedom from the segregation of an eclipsed life who have the power to cultivate mutual understanding and co-operation. The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship.”

All broken truths are evil. It is a broken truth if we miss the truth of our existence. The evil is if we feign finality when it is obviously incomplete. The cycle finds its end when the individual realises the universal and thus reaches freedom. Tagore found real freedom in the discharge of obligations to the universe. Anything that impairs this basis was hurtful to Tagore ; any movement conceived in denial of this truth was false to him. But in the process of attaining freedom one must bind his will in order to save its forces from distraction and wastage, “so as to gain for it the velocity which comes from the bondage itself.” Tagore’s grievance was that those who sought liberty on a political plane “constantly curtail it and reduce their freedom of thought and action to that narrow limit which is necessary for making political power secure, very often at the cost of liberty of conscience.” That is damaging indeed.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s *The Religion of Man*, P. 188.

## THE PROBLEM OF REALITY

We are in touch with this world through hunger and thirst and all our biological needs. We come in contact with nature to satisfy those needs. That is the physical man. But there is the personal man found in the region where "we are free from all necessity,—above the needs both of body and mind—above the expedient and useful." This personal man, the highest in man as described by Tagore, establishes personal relations with the world. "Man has a fund of emotional energies which is not all occupied with his self-preservation." These emotional forces are the creative forces. It will be a tragedy if they are disciplined, canalised into standardised channels at the dictate of an extraneous organisation. That kills the individual and makes him a machine. Man is thus debarred to reveal his personality. It was Tagore's thesis that "man's energies, running on two parallel lines,—that of utility and self-expression, tend to meet and mingle."<sup>1</sup> We are not mere facts; we are persons. And human beings cannot be content with drifting along the stream of circumstances; they must harmonise their existence through the ideal of love.

It is true that the instruments of our necessity assert that we must have food, shelter, clothes, comforts and convenience. But Tagore believed that men were not "a mere living catalogue of endless wants." There is in them an ideal of perfection, a sense of unity, which is a harmony between parts and a harmony with surroundings. The truth of the world, according to him, is not in the masses of substance, not in the number of things, but in their relatedness. "All our knowledge of things is knowing them in their relation to the universe, in that relation which is truth."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, absolute separateness is a kind of immoral rebellion. "All proofs of truth are

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Personality*, P. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, Pp. 5-6.

credentials of relationship. Facts are not a break in the unity of the whole, so synthesis on the law of proportion represents man's striving for wholeness." After all, "man is not a mere living money-bag jumping from profit to profit, and breaking the backbone of human races in its financial leap-frog."<sup>1</sup> The physical world exists, but the root of reality lies in the understanding of it. This theory of knowledge is to be accepted.

The ultimate truth of our personality is that we are no mere biologists or geometricians; "we are the dreamers of dreams, we are the music-makers." Tagore sought to lay emphasis on creative impulses. He acknowledged no doctrine or injunction; he accepted the attitude of our entire being towards a truth which is ever to be revealed in its own endless creation. "Through creation man expresses his truth; through that expression he gains back his truth in its fulness." Tagore believed that life was a continual process of synthesis, and not of addition "and that growth is the movement of a whole towards a yet fuller wholeness." But the spirit of wholeness is attained when our activities are blended with creative ideals. The production and enjoyment of wealth, the amassing and spending of money, all this needs to be transformed into an organic whole by some spiritual design of life. Tagore, therefore, observed: "The one question before all others that has to be answered by our civilisations is not what they have and in what quantity, but what they express and how."<sup>2</sup>

The isolation of our consciousness within our own self hides the great truth of our unity; it gives rise to doubt and contention; we cling to objects and forget that they are mere parts of the all to which we are related. Tagore sought freedom from the isolation of the self, from the isolation of things, which accentuates and sharpens our sense of

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, P. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Creative Unity*, P. 22.

possession. Truth consists in our perfect relationship with all. "To come out of the bounds of our sensibility and mental vision into a wider freedom is the meaning of our immortality." Tagore learnt from nature that the "true meaning of living is outliving, it is ever growing out of itself." He explained his point thus :

"The fruit clings to its stem, its skin clings to the pulp and the pulp to the seed so long as the fruit is immature, so long as it is not ready for its course of further life. Its outer covering and its inner core are not yet differentiated, and it only proves its life by its strength of tenacity. But when the seed is ripe its hold upon its surroundings is loosened, its pulp attains fragrance, sweetness, and detachment, and is dedicated to all who need it. Birds peck at it and it is not hurt ; the storm plucks it and flings it to the dust, and it is not destroyed. It proves its immortality by renunciation."

In the same way, Man gives his best when he gives himself up for others. The limitedness of our shell-life is to be discarded for a plunge into the wide range of immortality. In man's nature there is a division between the fleeting and the permanent. Life within the environment of our self must find its truth when it pursues its infinite truth ; the fleeting thus seeks fulfilment in permanence.

Tagore never suggested that material utility would be ignored. The temple of human mind has two gates—the gate of necessity and the gate of joy which is not bound by utilitarian consideration. The necessity shall have to be faced, solved. Man at no period of history was free from his lower passion which urged him to pursue his selfishness. But Tagore's complaint was that the fragmentariness of utility must not be permitted to occupy more than its legitimate place and power in society ; rather he preferred that it should never forget its subordinate position in human affairs. He was, however, pained to find that "the whole of the human world, throughout its length and breadth, has felt the gravitational pull of a giant planet of greed, with concentric rings of innumerable satellites, causing in our society a marked deviation from the moral

orbit.”<sup>1</sup> With his cult of power and idolatry of money man has reverted to his primitive barbarism. With Tagore, human tragedy consists not in material poverty but in the deprivation of the spiritual force which gives cadence to the insensate craze for greed. Hence, human individuals, freed from moral and spiritual bonds, find “a boisterous joy in a debauchery of destruction.” In the language of Tagore, “the distinctive feature of materialism is the measurability of its outward expression, which is the same thing as the finiteness of its boundaries. To increase one’s own bounds one has necessarily to encroach upon those of others. So, because the pride of Power is the pride of quantity ; the most powerful telescope, when pointed in the direction of Power, fails to reveal the store of peace across the sea of blood. In short, the value which our entity receives from power is different from that which it receives from love.” The revelation of one’s being in the field of love is the highest goal of humanity. With Tagore, the principle of power was neither the final nor the supreme Truth. The blindness of power overrules the rule of rhythm in the universe. “Restraint is the gateway of the God.” Music is gained by the restraining of the sound ; harmony is achieved by the curbing of greed.

Reality, as is argued by the Marxist, is primarily the product of perception of the class antagonism existing in modern society and of the anarchy ruling in production ; it is nothing more than that. Tagore had a different concept of reality. With him, “reality is the harmony which gives to the component parts of a thing the equilibrium of the whole.”<sup>2</sup> Tagore was not unmindful that the satisfaction of man’s needs was urgent ; it gave him freedom in the material world. But the material man is a detached part of the moral man ; it soon outruns the complete humanity which is the whole reality. In the Upanishads it is said in

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Unity*, P. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Nationalism*, P. 84.

a parable that there are two birds sitting on the same bough, one of which feeds and the other looks on. Tagore pointed out that there were both of these birds in man himself, one busy with its needs, and the other with its joy of vision. To quote Tagore, "the fact that we exist has its truth in the fact that every thing else does exist, and the 'I am' in me crosses its finitude whenever it deeply realises it in the 'thou art'. This crossing of the limit produces joy, the joy that we have in beauty, in love, in greatness." It is self-forgetting (or in other words, self-sacrifice) which is an acknowledgment of this our experience of the infinite. This explains the basis of our social service as the fulfilment of our individual existence. When an individual realises himself, that is an expansion of his own reality.

Tagore emphasised that the human mind should accept the need of transcending the merely utilitarian and feeling the beautiful at some moments of its being. In his opinion, "the economic life of a nation is not an isolated fact, and to-day side by side with economic poverty, we are faced with a cultural poverty which puts us to shame—shame that is in no way lessened when we consider what we once were."<sup>1</sup>

### SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

Tagore lamented that we had neglected to pay due attention to our social system and that our whole emphasis was being directed outward. In our country it was the King who warred and hunted and the burden of civic obligations was cast on the people.

<sup>1</sup> Published in the Visva-Bharati Quarterly, May 1935. Mahatma Gandhi affirmed that the present need of India was absolutely economic, for "to a people famishing and idle the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages." Gandhiji rebuked the Poet for presenting to his country's gaze the beautiful picture of birds early in the morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky, for the human birds under the Indian sky could not be coaxed even into a flutter of their wings for want of strength.

Where the responsibility for the welfare of people lies, there beats the heart of the nation. Hence, Tagore was insistent on repeating "that disaster can only overtake our country when its social body, its *Samaj*, is crippled. That is why we have never staked our all to resist a change of sovereignty, but have clung with might and main to the freedom of our *Samaj*." This explains our historical evolution; this explains the profound tragedy of British rule where the State is being burdened with communal duties. Accordingly, Tagore propounded his anti-State attitude which was in keeping with India's genius. His anti-State attitude arose principally out of certain basic factors which shaped his thought considerably.

1. Government in our country had no relations with our social organisation. "Whatever we may seek from the former must be paid for out of our freedom. From whichever of its duties our *Samaj* seeks relief by getting it done by *Sarkar* (Government), to that extent will it be disabled with an incapability which was not of its essence in the past."

2. Tagore believed that dependence on the favours of others was the sign of the truly pessimistic wretch. He refused to bend his knees and fold his hands for other's favours; he had faith in the powers of his own people. Reward is to be earned, not received as a favour.

3. To establish a personal relationship between man and man was always India's main endeavour. Whomsoever we came into contact with we drew into the circle of friendship, as India never got into the habit of looking on man as a machine for the furtherance of some interest. The intrusion of the political State takes away that personal bond. India is unwilling to forego the sweetness of human relationship.

4. Hindu Dharma has shown the way for every householder to transcend the narrowness of home and to relate himself to the universal. "Each one of us shall, for



every day of our lives, take up the burdens of our country. This shall be our glory, this is our dharma. The time has come when each of us must know that he is not alone, that insignificant though he be, he cannot be neglected, nor must he neglect the meanest."

5. It is necessary to have a centre to which the *shakti* of the country may flow where it will accumulate, and from which it can be appropriately distributed. No doubt we should contrive, as best we may, that disease should not gain entrance from without, but what if, in spite of us, it does so? Are we not to have our internal vital force ready to combat it? If such force be there, no outside aggression can reduce us to lifelessness, for its very dharma is to cure wounds, to co-ordinate efforts, and to maintain the fullest consciousness.

6. The power of rewarding good work must be placed in the hands of our *Samaj*, or else shall we deprive ourselves of a patent source of self-satisfaction. The reward must not come from Government.

7. Any *Samaj* which concentrates all its attention on sheer self-preservation cannot freely move on or act, and it comes to a state of death in life. The barriers within which the Hindu *Samaj* entrenched itself with all it could gather together caused India to lose her place in the world.

8. When India lost her ancient glory and remained stagnant, the British conquest became complete, and the *Samaj* began to show cracks and to give way. It made us aware—how wonderfully strong we had been and how miserably weak we have become. The true way to self-defence is to use our inherent powers. The way to stem the tide of wastage of heart and taste and intellect is to become our true selves, consciously, actively and with our full strength.

Tagore in developing his thesis propounded in *Swadeshi Samaj* observed<sup>1</sup> :

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article which was published as an appendix to *Swadeshi Samaj* (Rabindra-Rachanavali, Vol. 3).

“We are not strong where Europe is strong. We need not waste our efforts for self-preservation in the same direction with Europe. The source of strength in Europe is the State. The State has taken upon itself the responsibility of discharging all welfare-efforts—the State distributes alms, the State imparts education, the State looks to the preservation of religion. Therefore, the best way open to European civilisation in the matter of saving it from internal erosion and attack from without is to strengthen, activise and energise State rule. In our country, society is the source of our welfare. It pervades our society under the cloak of religion. Consequently, India has so long considered the preservation of her religion, her society, as the only way of self-protection. India has not cast a look at kingdom ; she has looked at her society. Hence, freedom in society is India’s real freedom. Real freedom consists in doing good, in preserving religion. So long through various misfortunes India did not abandon her task. The English wanted our kingdom, they have got it. But their inroads on society are not legitimate—we are handing it over without their asking for it.”

Hindu society under the protecting wing of the State will lose its validity. So Tagore vehemently protested against the circumscribing of the functions of society. In his opinion, we can only save ourselves from ruin and stagnation by developing our own strength. It is our shame that we are wasting away our ancestral property ; we shall be justifying ourselves if we can expand the richness of society. “Society shall have to be awakened, it shall have to accept all responsibilities for the sake of our self-protection. Society will solve its problem when the burden will be shouldered by it.” It will depend upon the vitality of society how far and to what extent it shall answer the needs of the country.

The canker is at the root ; the symptoms of our comatose condition are traceable to the fact that our village community lies moribund and its life-giving institutions are uprooted and are “floating like dead logs down the stream of time.” That is why there is no food, no health, no joy, no hope, no man to help his neighbour. That is why when the blow comes, heads are bent down to receive it ; when injustice is suffered, the blame is cast on the evil star. We

are all equally guilty. Tagore, therefore, advised the educated and the gentle classes not to drift away from the people but to unite with the masses in building up the commonwealth that was to be ; he appealed to the landlords to give fresh life to the villages. "Let ryots be strong, so that even the temptation to oppress them may not exist. Is the zamindar a shop-keeper that he should calculate only his petty takings ? Unless he seriously cultivates his ancestral privilege of giving, he will soon find the remnants of his power lost." Tagore was thus never indifferent to the lessons of history—that power departs from those who fail to give.

It will be uncritical to hold that Tagore merely indulged a sentimental attitude towards the past. He knew that a healthy tradition at one time might be a pernicious prejudice at another. The real test is that we must use our minds and try to discover the best method in a particular people at a particular stage of development. Blind or timid adherence to the traditional way of life should be discouraged. The historical sense makes every thinker acutely conscious of "his place in time, of his own contemporaneity." Tagore had this historical sense, so he could not forget the tradition and the genius of India. It must be the duty of every conscious thinking person to understand the society in which he lives.

Tagore placed the following programme before his countrymen in 1908 as President of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Pabna :

1. Unless we can move with the times, we are lost.
2. The watchword of the day is organisation ; of whatever qualities we may be possessed, we are powerless unless we organise ourselves against organised encroachment.
3. Our national consciousness does not yet fully and uniformly pervade our organism. While we are busy strengthening one spot, another grows weak. The classes must carry their work into the midst of the masses and thus destroy the separating barriers.

4. The desired unity and intensity of the national consciousness cannot be brought about by argument or persuasion. The many points of artificial difference that separate the sophisticated classes from the masses are so many bars to the proper growth and spread of this consciousness.

5. Internecine conflict among the educated classes cannot but retard the consummation. Let the ultimate be relegated to the future, and all matters of dispute be confined to the debating assemblies. Different ways and methods there may and must be, but there can be no possible difference in regard to the necessity for embarking without loss of time on the dreadful sea of work we have to cross.

Tagore in his talk with Governor Yen of Shansi, China, (reported in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* in October 1924) explained in detail what he had meant by the reconstruction of village life. He found that a disruption of life, a process of social destruction, had been going on, in India and in China. The task was to give new hope and new strength to the people who had lost faith in ideals and who were merely repeating the habit of the past and not producing anything, nor adapting their thought to the new age. "When society is living it can adapt itself to new conditions, but when it is dead it merely copies its own past and cannot build its future." This has happened to India. First, our people had come to a point where they were merely carrying on their life in a feeble manner; secondly, they toil but the fruits go to others who are cleverer. There can be no real civilisation, to quote Tagore, when the best ideals are concentrated in the hands of a few powerful men, whilst the bulk of the population has neither the leisure nor the mind to enjoy, and remains desolate. In the opinion of Tagore, two things are essential:

1. Villagers must realise that their destiny rests in their own hands, that they must be able to think and to act and to gather around them those who will not look down

upon them as inferiors but who will regard them as kith and kin.

2. Unless the whole people is happy no individual can have true happiness. "Unless all are wealthy no man, however rich, can have real wealth."

Tagore explained his standpoint clearly in the following way :

"Wisdom in the East has demanded that the living soul of man should dwell in the whole of society, that society should be dominated throughout by some living spiritual ideals and not that one part of society should have all the power in its keep. This power should be evenly distributed among the people. Our social system depended upon mutual obligation, upon ethical ideals accepted by all the people. In the West political life is concentrated in a particular group of men or in some machine, and its obligations are borne by some special group. For this reason the moment that the political life is threatened, the whole life is threatened. In the East whilst the military and the ambitious men fought their battles the people as a whole remained unmolested, and therefore their civilisation survived for centuries and is still living. The time has come to renew the life of the people, who must learn to look after their own affairs. There must be a living adjustment and a new current of vitality,—a new stream of ideals must supply the people with a living purpose."

Tagore knew full well that "it is the great multitude, the common people, who bear the burden of civilisation." They toil and live a poor life so that a small minority of us can have leisure, leisure to enjoy life and to cultivate the mind. We are the parasites whom they maintain with their own blood. The country can only be truly free when the common people become conscious of their own selves. Until then they will always be exploited, and their lives, overladen with misery and ignorance, will keep the whole country at a low level.<sup>1</sup> Tagore, therefore, pleaded that "it has become my life's work to try to restore the fullness of life to those of my race who have been deprived of their own proper share of physical and intellectual opportunities and to open the inner path of communica-

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's interview with a Chinese Delegation in Tokyo in 1920.

tion with other nations for the purpose of establishing perfect human relationship which is the real goal of civilisation.”<sup>1</sup>

Tagore postulated that the ultimate aim of those who had power should be the promotion of social co-operation, not in one group as against the other, but in the whole human race. Tagore had the liberal outlook, so he regarded the welfare of the State as residing ultimately in the welfare of the individual ; he could not regard the State as the end and individuals merely as indispensable ingredients, whose welfare was to be subordinated to “a mystical totality which is a cloak for the interest of the rulers.” Bertrand Russell cast his vote for liberal education which sought “to give a sense of the value of things other than domination, to help to create wise citizens of a free community, and through the combination of citizenship with liberty in individual creativeness to enable men to give to human life that splendour which some few have shown that it can achieve.”

After the manner of Tagore, Bertrand Russell visualised that “every man and woman should be neither a slave nor a rebel, but a citizen, that is, a person who has, and allows to others, a due proportion, but no more, of the governmental mentality.” Russell agrees with Tagore that “if social life is to satisfy social desires, it must be based upon some philosophy not derived from the love of power.” It is true that Tagore envisaged not a classless society, but he vehemently discarded power philosophy and believed in the taming of power. He wanted to create in society conditions for the taming of power—those conditions could be found in self-reliance, self-control and creative ideas of man. He could not support the extinction of the freedom of will for the sake of standardised uniformity. Tagore’s thesis was echoed by Bertrand Russell<sup>2</sup> when he observed :

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Power*, P. 284.

"If I had to select four men who have had more power than any others, I should mention Buddha and Christ, Pythagoras and Galileo. No one of these four had the support of the State until after his propaganda had achieved a great measure of success. No one of the four had much success in his own lifetime. No one of the four would have affected human life as he has done if power had been his primary object. No one of the four sought the kind of power that enslaves others, but the kind that sets them free—in the case of the first two, by showing how to master the desires that lead to strife, and thence to defeat slavery and subjection ; in the case of the second two, by pointing the way towards control of natural forces. It is not ultimately by violence that men are ruled, but by the wisdom of those who appeal to the common desires of mankind, for happiness, for inward and outward peace, and for the understanding of the world in which, by no choice of our own, we have to live."

The arguments from history and psychology will confirm the experience that irresponsible power cannot remain benevolent. Accordingly, Tagore asked for brakes of genuinely democratic control in the social organisation without "absolutism" by one group or caste or class. Love of power should be tamed, dogmatism discarded, and scepticism abandoned ; there should be wide diffusion of self-control and self-reliance so that every one can work for all, in his own way, within the ambit of society. Tyranny is undesirable in itself—whether it is tyranny by a class, or the State. According to Tagore, "democracy can never be true in a society where greed grows, uncontrolled, encouraged, even admired by the populace." It cannot also grow where there is a constant struggle amongst individuals to capture public organisations for the satisfaction of their own personal ambition. Nor can it grow where individuals are at the mercy of the all-powerful State throttling all that is best in individuals in the interests of dull uniformity and spreading intemperance to the multitude.

After the withering away of the State Marx thought of the Commune which was to be a working corporation, legislative and executive at one and the same time. Marx wrote : "Instead of deciding once in three or six years

which member of the ruling class was to represent and repress the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, organised in communes as a means of securing the necessary workers, controllers, clerks and so forth for its business in the same way as individual suffrage serves any individual employer in his." To put it in the language of Lenin, "the representatives must themselves work, must themselves execute their own laws, must themselves verify their results in actual practice, must themselves be directly responsible to their electorate." That is, representative institutions remain but parliamentarism no longer exists. Lenin recognised the possibility of excesses by individual persons, but such excesses should be suppressed by "the armed nation itself."

This Marxian ideal that parliamentary institutions are to be replaced by the working bodies which both make and apply the laws and that the armed workers themselves shall be the Government will help the reader to understand Tagore's anti-State attitude which is, however, attuned to different keys. Tagore realised that (1) society as a whole should be dominated by creative ideals; (2) one part of society should not have all the power in its keeping; (3) the destiny of the people must be worked out by themselves; (4) the duty of Government is to enable people to remove their own obstacles and not to remove obstacles for them. Tagore made it clear that "we should give strength to the people but never take upon us the work which should be theirs, by keeping all power and responsibility in our own hands. A wise Government will not exercise its power, but will allow that power to grow out of the mind and capacity of the people." In this wise, Tagore's village *mandal* (Association) is the gathering of the whole people making laws for all and executing laws in the interests of all. Every one is a worker; every one is to obey the whole organisation known as society; every one is to play his part in society; every one is asked to free himself from the grip of the self to submerge himself in



the love of all fellow-creatures. Love is the goal, freedom is the means ; sin is that which keeps us in the prison-house of the self, the whole people are to be made happy and the whole people must be working towards that end. These were the social ideals, preached by Tagore. It is fulness of life which makes one happy, not fullness of purse. There is thus a striking resemblance between Tagore and Morgan in their judgment of civilisation. Morgan who is quoted with approval by Engels observes : "The interests of society are paramount to individual interests, and the two must be brought into just and harmonious relations. A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind." Morgan visualises the future when he observes : "Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes."

The very same reading of history led Tagore to emphasise his anti-State attitude, because he was anxious to nurse the creative ideals in society. Tagore did not of course agitate for "the withering away of the State," but his philosophy was bound up with the curbing of the influence of the State. He recognised that the scheme of social reconstruction would be satisfactory if the resources locked in the human unit could be utilised for the welfare of society as a whole. Political action was not the only means of human improvement ; political State was not the only agency of expressing the democratic will. In the Communist Manifesto (1848), the general proposition was to centralise all means of production in the hands of the State. But it was found that progress was illusory unless human workers would shoulder the increasing management responsibility. The Syndicalist and the Guild Socialist emphasised the view that State socialism was not the remedy ; all this rather helped the emergence of the doctrine that an

organisation of the community must organise production and distribution for common ends so that every one can play his part without the suffocation of a bureaucratic machinery. The organisation should be of the type of "a self-controlling function." According to Tagore, the creative ideas of communal life cannot be achieved if the movement of construction is made to traverse only the political path through the help of the political State. Tagore was basically in sympathy with Engels' analysis that "civilisation achieved things of which gentile society was not even remotely capable. But it achieved them by setting in motion the lowest instincts and passions in man and developing them at the expense of all his other abilities. From its first day to this, sheer greed was the driving spirit of civilisation; wealth and again wealth and once more wealth, wealth, not of society, but of the single scurvy individual—here was its one and final aim."<sup>1</sup> Tagore also pointed out that man in his insensate greed for profit had been digging holes into the very foundations, not only of his livelihood but also of his life; he had been feeding upon his body. When selfish passion gains ascendancy, the gulf that separates man from man widens, and the social system is eventually bled to death. But these antagonisms, according to Tagore, cannot be annihilated by power, standing above society, but they are to be kept within the bounds of order by the creative ideals of society. If those creative ideals are abandoned, man's personality will be powdered out of existence on the plea of dissolving contradictions in society. This was the basis of his anti-State attitude. The Marxian analysis of the State as the organ of co-ercion to maintain the interests of the ruling class goes to strengthen Tagore's anti-State attitude where the collectivity of production and appropriation is practically recognised and production for use encouraged. That was why Tagore condemned the reckless wastage of humanity produced by the ambition of

<sup>1</sup> Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

man. In the villages he found the light of life dimmed, the joy of existence dulled and the natural threads of social communion snapped. It should be our mission, Tagore proclaimed, "to restore the full circulation of life's blood into the maltreated limbs of society, to bring to the villages health and knowledge, wealth of space in which to live, wealth of time in which to work and to rest and to enjoy; respect which will give them dignity; sympathy which will make them realise their kinship with the world of men, and not merely their servient position."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore was keen that the masses should understand their position, and seek to remedy the wrongs. They are left unorganised; they are not acquainted with the true situation; they bemoan and lament. The first essential thing is that there should be cordial relationship between classes and masses. Next thing, the masses must be strengthened, they must stand organised and powerful. Real collaboration and true union are possible when both parties are strong; the union between the strong and the weak cannot be lasting. In Europe labour has become strong, so workers can demand recognition of their rights. It accelerates our deterioration when one of the component parts of our society is weak. So long as the masses remain oppressed and suppressed, they will create erosion in our social structure which will degrade the classes. Power corrupts people, and it breaks out into ghastly tyranny if there is no taming of power by social discipline and control. Accordingly, "the lower class" man is he who is self-centred; "the upper class" man is he who disciplines himself to the service of great ends beyond himself. Tagore enunciated the doctrine of the New Aristocracy, and he expected many things from "the upper class."

Tagore believed that one could do good to others, when he would approach them through the gateway of love and affection. "It is not possible for us to do good to the other

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on City And Village.

whenever we want to. We must earn the right to do good. He who is placed high can easily do harm to him who is placed low in society, but if good turn is to be done, the benefactor must not remain in a high place, he must come down on the same level with the person to be benefitted. The one cannot accept real benefit by way of alms, or by way of debt ; he can only accept when it is his due. But when we are keen on doing good turn unto others, often we are goaded on to such action by the intoxication of vanity. We do good turn only to proclaim that we are above the ordinary people. This harms our soul ; this definitely damages the people benefitted. It is only through the strength of love and affection that good turn can be done. There is no disrespect in the gift of affection, but man is insulted only when there is the barren act of welfare. The best way of humiliating man is to do good turn without showing love unto him.”<sup>1</sup>

This love is not discernible when one likes to remain aloof from the other, holds no social communion with the other, and accentuates the points of difference in exclusive living. If we fail to recognise our people as our own, it cannot succeed if for political reasons we like to establish unity amongst all the component parts of our society, amongst all the different communities of our country. “Differences there must be between an individual and an individual, between one community and the other, but the task of social inter-course is to sublimate the differences. There is difference between the rich and the poor, but if the rich man magnifies the differences when the poor man comes to his place, it will not be graceful, nor will it be true if the rich man in pursuit of political necessity sheds tears for the poor and throws himself in the bosom of the poor.” Tagore laid emphasis on the personal bond of relationship through love, because in our country, we have kept the

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Tagore's article on *Loka-Hit* (Social Welfare) written in 1921 B.S.

poor, the lowly, the outcaste, beyond the pale of society of "gentleman." That is, the classes have lived apart from the masses. The union of heart has been blocked by social exclusiveness, by communal antipathy. Accordingly, he did not favour empty agitation where the love for the wholeness of the country was absent; he discarded service which did not cater to the needs of all sections of the country.

It is interesting to note that both Tagore and Bernard Shaw believed in the government of the people, for the people, but not by the people, as both of them recognise that there are super-men whose services cannot and should not be ignored. It is not anti-democratic to believe, as Bernard Shaw points out, that the human race is divided into men and super-men and that every adult on the electoral register is not qualified to do every work efficiently. Bernard Shaw explains his point in his own inimitable way :

"A world in which the voice of the people is the voice of God, and the political capacity and sagacity of every body over the age of 21 infinite and infallible, is to me a fairyland which has never existed and is not postulated in any oracle of music. By democracy I mean a social order aiming at the greatest available welfare for the whole population and not for a class. . . . . There are no democracies in the West; there are only rank plutocracies, all of them now Fascist to the finger-tips, having thrown over Cobden and Bright, and grasped the enormous economy and lucrativity demonstrated by the Socialists of State-financed Capitalism which is English for Fascism."<sup>1</sup>

At ordinary times, democracy does not bring the best man to the top. There is deterioration in the personnel of Government; there is corruption and debasement in politics. To quote the words of Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, "politics is an industry in a man; to prosper requires less intelligence and knowledge than boldness and capacity for intrigue. It has already become in some States the most

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from an article in *Time and Tide* in 1945. Mr. Bernard Shaw in the preface to *The Apple Cart* maintained that "democracy cannot be government by the people; it can only be government by consent of the governed."

ignominious of careers. Parties are syndicates for exploitation, and its forms become even more shameless."

Both Tagore and Bernard Shaw are not enamoured of Parliament guiding the destiny of the nation where party politicians dominate and where Yes-men and women sit in the smoking room or the library, cast their votes on the ringing of the division bell at the whip of the Party directions, most of them being unfamiliar with the wishes, aspirations and grievances of the constituencies. The business of the democrat is to find out super-men in different spheres of activities. That is how individuals save the nation. The fact that the world is best fashioned by super-men stares us in the face all through history, past and present. This is inevitable from the fact that the mass of the people are not willing to fight for their convictions and that there is innate inequality between human beings. Accordingly, those who possess the will to fight for convictions and ability to lead others rule the majority.

Human inequality, as Prof. J. B. S. Haldane points out, springs from nature and nurture. The differences between human beings are ascribed to four causes : (1) difference of ancestry ; (2) segregation ; (3) difference of environment ; (4) freedom of the will, or any other events not determined by the past. The recognition of the innate inequality should lead not to less, but to greater, equality of opportunity. Social organisation should be accordingly fashioned. Democracy is to be valued only when it grants equality of opportunity. Prof. J. B. S. Haldane in a broadcast talk in November 1929 put the case very lucidly :

"Between different men and women there are immense inborn differences which no amount of education can overcome. The ideal society would enable every man and woman to make the best of their inborn possibilities. Hence, it must have two characteristics. First, liberty, which would allow people to develop along their individual lines, and not attempt to force all into one mould, however admirable. Second, equality of opportunity, which would mean that, as far as is humanly possible, every man and woman would be able to obtain

the position in society for which they were best suited by nature. The waste of human beings under our present system is a far worse evil than any merely economic waste. I believe in democracy because equality of opportunity is impossible where inherited rank and wealth is important."

The question then naturally arises, what are the contents of democracy? Equal consideration for all, equal opportunity for all, equal freedom of expression and association for all—these are obviously the contents of democracy, according to the tenets of liberalism. Our dilemma is that "we need to be governed, and yet to control our governors." But the best governors do not accept any control except that of their own consciences, and the public are also prone to abuse the power of control. There is another dilemma. "History shows," Professor Jeze observes, "that each social class, as it becomes master of political power, hastens to use it to favour its social interests. No doubt it does so in good faith, that is why it calls the interest of its class the general interest of the community." In a word, "no State can go very far beyond the implications of its economic postulates." It is a favourite thesis of Professor Harold Laski that political democracy ultimately leads to economic democracy, because the assumptions of capitalism contradict the implications of democracy. But as each social class grows its vested interests which are sought to be protected in the name of the common man, economic democracy becomes a far cry, especially when political democracy is replaced by the one-party Government, intolerant of the accommodation of the other point of view. Even in Russia, the incentive of material possession and enjoyment ranks high, and "in no other country in the world, either now or at any time since the rise of the machine age, has the system of piece-work and the inequality of pay that it ensures been in such universal use or so continuously and vehemently encouraged."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore had the prophetic vision of seeing through

<sup>1</sup> *Mother Russia* By Maurice Hindus, p. 183.

various historical experiences, and he found that democracy could have full trial only when ambition was disciplined, greed regulated and the self merged in love and service. Democracy can never be true in a society where greed grows uncontrolled, and people are drugged with admiration for power politics. So it is of great importance that minds are to be cleansed and illumined with knowledge. Those men for whom wine has more attraction than food can hardly establish democracy. It is in this background of contemporary political thought that Tagore's village commune, based on perfect democratic superstructure, is to be appreciated. The State is hardly neutral in political struggles, and every group seeks to present its claims in the form most likely to give them a universal appeal. Tagore really stood for the universal in man. Tagore's thought may be in the background today, because of the dominance of untruth in the counsels of human affairs. A principle, a system, an idea, is not true, as Professor H. Laski points out, simply because a large number of people are so convinced of its truth that they are prepared to fight for it. The wisdom of a system is to be judged if it cures or accentuates evils.

Tagore's emphasis on the reconstruction of society, the regulation of human passions and desires, the sublimation of the self for the welfare of others, the synthesis of the finite with the infinite, carries significance if it is remembered that no social revolution is complete unless the ruling classes and the struggle for power are eliminated. It has been confirmed from historical experiences that enduring oppressive conditions have answered the call for the fight for freedom, but the net result of each revolt has been the establishment of a new tyranny. Marx and Engels complained in the Manifesto of the Communist Party that "the history of all human society, past and present, has been the history of class struggles." They called for the proletarian movement which was to be an independent movement of the overwhelming majority in



the interests of that majority. But the Manifesto was historically inaccurate when it hoped: "When the proletariat, in the course of its fight against the bourgeoisie, necessarily consolidates itself into a class, by means of a revolution makes itself the ruling class, and as such forcibly sweeps away the old system of production—it therewith sweeps away the system upon which class conflicts depend, makes an end of classes, and thus abolishes its own rule as a class."

Society can only be classless when there are no ruling groups and when there is no struggle for power. A few persons must be elected by the community out of free will to hold the keys to power, subject to recall in the event of abuse of power, but there should be no group receiving preferential treatment as a group and exercising control over "access to the instruments of production" as a group. And there should be no struggle for such control and preference throttling down the free will of the community. These are the marks of classless society. What is a ruling class? It is nothing more than a group of persons who exercise "control." What is the struggle for power? It is nothing less than the craving for and enjoyment of preferential treatment on behalf of the controlling group as a group. It is a false belief that with the elimination of private property and private profit motive there would be classless society with no vested ruling groups and without any base struggle for power. The implications of ownership are those of control. If there is no control, there is no gain from ownership; if there is control, there is little meaning in urging for ownership. In fact, those who control are the real owners. If there is nationalisation of the means of production for the transference of ownership and control from one group to the other, it may show off better economic results, but that is no move for classless society. Lenin observed that the contemporary State was "the executive committee of the bourgeoisie." First, nationalisation by the capitalist State may be a step for-

ward, but it is not a swing for classless society. The problem is to turn the capitalist State into the workers' State. In the process of converting the capitalist State into the workers' State, there will be some group or classes exercising social dominance through the "managing" of the whole movement and of the various forces of production. "Those who control the State, those whose interests are primarily served by the State, are the ruling class under the structure of State-owned economy. Through the State, they will control access to the instruments of production. Through the State, they will control the distribution of the products of those instruments so that they themselves receive the privileged share." Thus the new economy will be an exploiting economy.<sup>1</sup> It is immaterial if the privileged will be the bourgeoisie or the new controlling group. Dr. James Burnham in *The Managerial Revolution* states that the managerial economy dominates the Russian experiment. Dr. Burnham has described the system of managerial economy as a type of "corporate exploitation" (opposed to the private exploitation of capitalism). Managers (that is, those who have the functions of guiding, administering, managing, organising the process of production) will exploit the rest of society as a corporate body, "their rights belonging to them not as individuals, but through the position of actual directing responsibility which they occupy." To quote Dr. Burnham again, "they, too, through the possession of privilege, power, and command of educational facilities, will be able to control, within limits, the personnel of managerial recruits; and the ruling class of managers will thus achieve a certain continuity from generation to generation." The emergence of the rule of the dominating class, even when capitalistic society is violently torn

<sup>1</sup> By an exploiting economy is meant an economy wherein one group receives a relatively larger share of the products of the economy than another. By exploitation is meant the process whereby such an unequal distribution comes about.

to shreds, can hardly be avoided, unless, according to Tagore, there is a new orientation of the outlook founded on positive virtues of self-discipline. Mr. Bernard Shaw put it vigorously in the preface on Bosses: "Private property can be communized. Capitalists and landlords can be pressed into the service of the community, or, if they are idle or incorrigibly recalcitrant, handed over to the police. But the decider, the dominator, the organiser, the tactician, the mesmerizer would remain. When dominators die, and are succeeded by persons who can only work a routine, a relapse is inevitable. . . . . For it is obvious that a business organised for control by an exceptional and omniscient head will go to pieces when that head is replaced by a common place numskull." Russia has thus passed into the hands of "the decider, the dominator, the organiser, the tactician, the mesmerizer." The so-called proletariat is surrounded with a halo of romance. Havelock Ellis points out that "the glorification of the proletariat has been the work of the middle class. Every movement to stir the proletariat has had a bourgeois leader. Karl Marx is the supreme type, a student seated in the library of the British Museum, consumed by enthusiastic zeal on behalf of the proletariat, and altogether remote from the actual facts of the developing proletarian situation." The actual facts are that with the perfection of machinery the class of those "who have hands to work and children to replace, but no other form of capital" are not wanted; it needs skilled workers. "Standardisation, nationalisation, and careful selection of personnel are the three great industrial factors of today, and they are totally incompatible with the existence of a proletariat." The concept of the proletariat is changing, and accordingly, the issue before us is not "the dictatorship of the proletariat," but the extinction of an exploiting economy. We must clear our minds of the cant which changes shapes. To put it in the language of Havelock Ellis, "once religious cant was the enemy; then it was political cant. To-day it is eco-

conomic cant.” Tagore preferred to attack the very basis of all cants.<sup>1</sup>

The exploitation of managerial economy is much more harsh on workers. Under the capitalist system, workers have freedom, however limited, to sell their labour to the competing employer and “to bargain,” if possible. Under managerial economy arising from nationalisation of the means of production, there is the one employer, that is the State, and there are no accidents or benefits of market bargaining.

It is pointed out by many that Soviet Russia is the first experiment in “socialism.” But results show that Russia has drifted far from socialistic economy. She has extirpated capitalist economy, but she has not accepted socialism. Russian development shows that “socialism is not possible of achievement or even of approximation in the present period of history,” with humanity uprooted from fuller development through love and service. Here, at this stage and in the present background of exploiting economy and of the beastliness in Man, Tagore’s point of view comes in for commendation. It is to be noted that “every shred of freedom and democracy has by now been purged from Russian life.” No opposition of any kind is tolerated. That shows the lack of freedom, the absence of democracy. The irritatingly one-track mind of the broker of Russian ideology is shut out from the appreciation of freedom and democracy, the synthesis of unity in diversity. Tagore dreaded the position where workers were by force

<sup>1</sup> It may be noted, in this context, that it is the middle class that gains in all revolutions. The middle class is the central class drawn from all classes, and soon it rises above class. Croce believes that the middle class represents spiritual values, reconciling, harmonising, and renewing the economic classes. It is the middle class which possesses the intellectual force and the generosity of spirit to see beyond class; it is from the middle class that brilliant champions of aristocracy have arisen, and today it is to the middle class that the champions of the proletariat belong. Genius is a middle class phenomenon (of course with individual exceptions). The dictatorship of the proletariat is a clever subterfuge to perpetuate the ascendancy of the new middle class.

made instruments of the State, limbs of the governmental machinery of the ruling dictatorial party. To quote Dr. Burnham, "all the evidence indicates that the autocracy of the Russian regime is the most extreme that has ever existed in human history, not excepting the regime of Hitler." Workers' groups in Russia are designed to protect the interests of the State at the cost of their own interests. It is for the new ruling groups that capitalists have been got rid of and the masses curbed. It is in their interests that the support of workers is advertised for the drawing out of "workers' black lists" and the deportation of recalcitrant workers to labour camps. "Leninism-Stalinism is not a scientific hypothesis but a great social ideology rationalising the social interests of the new rulers and making them acceptable to the minds of the masses. There is nothing inconsistent between this ideology on the one side and the purges, tyrannies, privileges, aggressions on the other; the task of the ideology is precisely to give fitting expression to the regime of those purges, tyrannies, privileges and aggressions."<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing analysis is given to place Tagore's philosophy of social reconstruction in proper perspective. The partisans of revolution are prone to speak of ideologies and standardised patterns, but Tagore emphasised that life had an inherent force of its own and that it could hardly be fitted into a particular ideology. Therefore, the situation does not ipso facto improve if we talk of socialism in the place of private enterprise, of the State in the place of free initiative, of planning in the place of individual freedom. The cancer of power politics is to be removed, and the integration of the "self" with the "soul", as urged by Tagore, is to be aimed at. Lenin recognised that the transition to socialism would have to be supervised by an enlightened vanguard which could understand the historic process as a whole. Stripped off ornamental phrases, the position is

<sup>1</sup> *The Managerial Revolution* By Dr. James Burnham.

this that the masses need leadership, and that leadership must be enlightened and self-less. There Tagore's approach is of constructive importance to the country. Tagore's "plan" is not a device to enlist the support of the masses for a new social revolution inasmuch as the Communist and the Fascist doctrines are. Tagore wanted to serve the people as a whole. Tagore sought to lift the individual out of himself and to make him glad to take part in the reconstruction of society on a new foundation, a foundation which does not accept exploitation as its basis. Tagore's scheme subjected "the individual to a great super-individual end" He wanted to revive the conception of life as service. His caution should not be confused with "reactionarism."<sup>1</sup> Tagore's caution receives approbation from Sigmund Freud who believes that Marxism is not a true social science as it does not show in detail "how these different factors—the general human instinctual disposition, its racial variations, and its cultural modifications—behave under the influence of varying social organisation, professional activities and methods of subsistence, how these factors inhibit or aid one another." Dr. Sigmund Freud put his case thus<sup>2</sup>:

"Theoretical Marxism, as put into effect in Russian Bolshevism, has acquired the energy, the comprehensiveness and the exclusiveness of a *Weltanschauung*, but at the same time it has acquired an almost uncanny resemblance to what it is opposing. Originally it was itself a part of science, and, in its realisation, was built up on science and technology, but it has nevertheless established a ban upon thought, which is as inexorable as was formerly that of religion. All critical examination of the Marxist theory is forbidden; doubts of its validity are as vindictively punished as heresy once was by the Catholic Church. The works of Marx, as the source of revelation, have taken the place of the Bible and the Koran, although they are no freer from contradictions and obscurities than these earlier holy books. And although practical Marxism has remorselessly

<sup>1</sup> Stalinism is what Leninism developed into, and it is no reflection on Marxism. Marxism is a historical analysis and a philosophy; Stalinism is a historical fact. The author's comments are all confined to Stalinism. This historical experience explodes the theory that Tagore was a visionary or a reactionary.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture on A Philosophy of Life.

swept away all idealistic systems and illusions, it has nevertheless developed illusions itself, which are no less dubious and unverifiable than their predecessors. It hopes, in the course of a few generations, so to alter men that they will be able to live together in the new order of society almost without friction, and that they will do their work voluntarily. In the meantime, it moves elsewhere the instinctual barriers which are essential in any society, it directs outwards the aggressive tendencies, which threaten every human community, and finds its support in the hostility of the poor against the rich, and of the hitherto powerless against the former holders of power. But such an alteration in human nature is very improbable."

Tagore's political ideals sprang from the idealist theory of the State and the dynamic view of social co-operation owing obedience not to any specific organ of coercion but to the moral instincts of Man. The history of humanity, it can be shown, is a protest against the doctrine that justice is the will of the stronger and that moral obligation is less compelling because it may end in failure.

For Hegel the State is the realisation of moral principles and concrete freedom ; it is the condition of social life. For Marx the State is the product of social life ; it exists to resolve class conflicts. For Tagore the State functions as a subsidiary organisation to keep law and order, as society is the living organism to harmonise antagonisms and divisions. With Tagore society is prior to the State.

It is to be noted that Tagore sought to establish his basic thesis that history was a progressive realisation of the "universal" in man. Man has two entities—the self and the universal. It is not the submerging of the "self" in the "universal" that is aimed at ; the best realisation is the harmonising of the two entities in the interests of social stability and security. Naturally, Tagore did not stand for the repression of individuality, but he was alive to the necessity of synthetizing one's interests with those of others. His constructive humanism laid stress on man as a real and living thing, and corporate social consciousness was the basis of his philosophy.

Men need one another to live in society ; the interdependence of human beings heightens the need for collaboration, rather than the conflict. It narrows down the claim of the egoistic individual ; it calls for living social consciousness in the supreme task of class collaboration. Tagore, along with Hegel, was a believer in class collaboration ; both of them deprecated the doctrine of class conflict as a solvent of social antagonisms and divisions. There is no denying the fact that each looks to himself, each class runs after its own mirage ; each community chases its own interests. The supreme task is to make him look inwardly to feel, serve and act for others. Tagore intensely believed that conflicts of interests were resolvable, and it was not mere sentimentality that social ties were to be made strong enough to awaken the " universal " in man and weaken the " ego " in the individual. If man is taken to be a bundle of nothing but crude self-interest, which Tagore never concedes, conflicts are carried beyond the pale of settlement on the basis of the acquisitive order of society. But Tagore's social theory seeks to bring human beings to self-consciousness—not to class consciousness. Social needs are at once subjective and objective, and accordingly, social behaviourism should not deny the " self " and the " universal " in Man.

The Fascist notion of the Corporative State, as is given out as a strain of Hegelianism, is definitely discarded by Tagore in his anti-State attitude, proclaimed in his *Swadeshi Samaj* and other political writings. In the march of Indian history, it was society which was left with the task of resolving conflicts. In fact, Indian society had an abundant measure of mobility to adjust differences and to accommodate different classes, communities and races without any aid of and reference to the State. India's social and religious institutions were adapted to the task of accommodation, and in meek adoration and with resolute determination Indians resolved all the problems on the plane of social consciousness without generating the dis-



ruptive forces of class consciousness. This social consciousness was born of the subordination of the self and the vindication of the "universal" in man. The emphasis on social instincts and social co-hesiveness as the limitation of the egoistic individual is a corollary to Tagore's basic philosophy that man seeks fulfilment and realisation in his service to others and that progress is the development of harmony and symmetry in man's activities. Disharmony and separateness are the cankers of social life, and accents of conflicts should not mar human relationships. For Tagore, "freedom awaits us there where we reach truth, not through feeling it by our senses, or knowing it by reason, but through the union of perfect sympathy." Tagore's ambition had all along been to feel "natural with nature and human with human society," and without the context of humanity and universality Tagore was "like the torn-away line of verse, always in a state of suspense."

The Marxist cannot get away from its central postulate that "the mode of production" is finally responsible for the development and progress of society. Needs change, so do productive methods change. But the mode of production refers not only to the instruments of production but to the men who make use of the instruments, and as such men's relations to production are the most important. The materialist conception of history, according to Marx, is nothing more and nothing less than the fact that the economic factor is the main determining factor, and not the sole determining factor, of the new change. This is definitely stated by Engels. There are other factors which exercise influence upon the course of historical struggles. Secondly, in the history of society, unlike in nature, actors are all endowed with consciousness, and they are men who act with deliberation, passion, emotion and instinct. Thus there is the conflict of innumerable individual wills and individual actions in the domain of human history. Results which are unintended follow from their actions. The hidden inner general laws, under pressure of different

actions, may and do converge on different lines. The Marxist has accepted the position that the state of affairs in human society is not analogous to that in the realm of unconscious nature. Moreover, life's virtue consists in rebellion, in rejection of the accepted laws and standardised course. Thirdly, Marx agrees that although men are the products of environment, yet environment itself is modified by men. Plekhanov pointed out that "in Marx's view, therefore, the task of materialism in the domain of history was to explain exactly how environment can be modified by men who are themselves a product of this environment."

From the above Marxian analysis, it is clear that men are not slaves of blind forces and that circumstances can be changed by men. Man must control his own evolution. It is undoubtedly true that "history never makes jumps unless the way has been prepared for them" and that "there can be no sudden change without a sufficient cause." But it will be an extremely narrow view to interpret historical progress by the play of the forces of production and reproduction alone. Progress is, in fact, the passage from the implicit to the explicit, in the realm of both matter and mind. Tagore's conception of the progress of society was founded on the following postulates :

1. Life fulfils itself in rebellion ; it grows and outgrows itself through extinction of the self.
2. There is no being in the world but only becoming ; the supreme reality is the law of change. Evolution never ceases in society. Stagnation is the anti-thesis of progress.
3. Development is the coming to light of what is latent and hidden. Men are not the slaves of environment ; they are often the architects of circumstances. Powerful men carve out new lines, revive unforeseen forces, and create new situations. It is not merely the blind factors of the external world that drive human history, but deliberate and conscious actions, motivated

under free and independent will, that shape the progress of society. It is because men are men that they can transcend the given social environment and exercise greater control and independence over the external world.

4. Historical events are governed by the nature of difficulties experienced in the course of social relations. Society moves on as it resolves conflicts. Accordingly, the mode of development is regulated by the nature of conflicts appearing on the scene. Each country thus moves on in its own way.

Tagore was not a materialist in the sense that he had never made mind subsidiary to matter. The Marxist argues that "matter is not a product of mind, but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter." In his opinion, the material, sensuously perceptible, world to which we belong is the only reality. Engels points out that "our consciousness and thinking, however supra-sensuous they may seem, are the products of a material, bodily organ, the brain. The influences of the external world upon man express themselves in his brain, are reflected therein as feelings, thoughts, instincts, volitions." Our sensations are the images of this external world, and human mind has no creative virtue of its own. Tagore believed in the rebellious nature of human mind transcending the factors of the external world.

The concept of mind as the product of matter, which is the core of materialism, according to the Marxist, can hardly be pursued to its logical conclusion. Prof. J. B. S. Haldane rightly observes that "if my opinions are the result of the chemical processes going on in my brain, they are determined by the laws of chemistry, not those of logic." To put the matter in another way, "if a super-biochemist made a working model of me, atom for atom, this robot would, on a materialistic view, have my memories. This may be the case, but if so I do not see how

knowledge is possible." The human body is composed of cells, and the cells of atoms. They have a life of their own. But their co-operation manifests itself in the life of the whole man, and more particularly in his consciousness. Consciousness depends not on the cell but on the co-operation of a very large number of cells. The aggregates do manifest qualities, such as life or consciousness, which may be quite foreign to their parts. This may be the result of "the doctrine of emergence."<sup>1</sup> There is no evidence of life or mind in the so-called inert matter, but there is in the human body. This life, organic unity, and consciousness, are facts "a good deal more certain than the existence of cells and atoms." Tagore testified to this "super-individual reality," and he knew that "the good life was always self-transcendence." Similarly, the co-operation of humanity gives rise to new qualities of good social life which man as an individual should aspire after. The doctrine of emergence holds that aggregates may have qualities which are foreign to their parts. Tagore has stood for qualities born of inter-relatedness which should determine, shape and fashion the progress of social life. Individual isolatedness is to be submerged in corporate life. The unification of human effort, the marriage of the mind and the heart, the moralisation of science and the rationalisation of ethics are, according to Tagore, the tasks before man. The progress of society is to be judged by these tests.

### CONCEPT OF PATRIOTISM

Tagore in one of his letters to Mr. C. F. Andrews explained his concept of patriotism, the basis of his love for the motherland. When India suffers from injustice, it is right that we should stand against it, and the responsibility

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Morgan's *Emergent Evolution* accepts the position that minds are associated with the physical organism, but are not deducible from the properties of that organism. The Russian physiologist, Pavlov, (who is not a psychologist) rejects the dualism of mind and matter. In any case, the ascendancy of matter over mind is not accepted.

is ours to right the wrong, not as Indians but as human beings. "I love India, but my India is an Idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore I am not a patriot—I shall ever seek my compatriots all over the world,"—thus observed Tagore. His central point was that he would not be ready to lose the true perspective of life and the world. His love for the country did not obstruct his natural relationship with others; if it were a barricade, he would fly away from contraction of consciousness. In one word, he had not the idolatry of geography but the love of mankind. That was why Tagore had to confess now and then that with all our grievances against the English nation, we could not but love the best Englishmen "as the best specimens of humanity." In reply to an English lady who had complained that Tagore had given vent to a feeling of anger against the British people, Tagore wrote: "I deeply feel for all the races who are being insulted and injured by the ruthless exploitation of the powerful nations belonging to the West or the East. I feel as much for the negroes, brutally lynched in America, often for economic reasons, and for the Koreans, who are the latest victims of Japanese Imperialism, as for any wrongs done to the helpless multitude of my own country."

Love of the self, whether national or individual, Tagore argued, can have no other destination except suicide. Tagore was proud to proclaim his hatred of national vanity all through his writings, where the love of man had found its utterance.

The University of Sydney wanted to know from Tagore if it was true that he would not visit Australia, even if he was wanted there. Tagore refused to go to Australia where Indians had been subject to inhuman treatment. He, however, informed the University of Sydney that he could not but accept the invitation "sent in the right spirit." In a letter to Mr. W. W. Pearson<sup>1</sup> in 1918, Tagore

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Letters to a Friend*, edited by Mr. C. F. Andrews, p. 80.

explained his attitude lucidly : “Pride of patriotism is not for me. I earnestly hope that I shall find my home anywhere in the world before I leave it. We have to fight against wrongs, and suffer for the cause of righteousness ; but we should have no petty jealousies or quarrels with our neighbours merely because we have different names.”

Tagore's patriotism was, therefore, cast in a different mould. When the non-co-operation movement was started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920, Tagore was willing to sit at his feet and to do his bidding if he commanded Tagore to co-operate with the countrymen “in service and love,” but Tagore refused to waste his manhood “in lighting fires of anger and spreading it from house to house.” In a letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews in September 18, 1920, Tagore wrote :

“It is not that I don't feel anger in my heart for injustice and insult heaped upon my motherland. But this anger of mine should be turned into the fire of love for lighting the lamp of worship to be dedicated through my country to my God. It would be an insult to humanity if I use the sacred energy of my moral indignation for the purpose of spreading a blind passion all over my country. It would be like using the fire from the altar of sacrifice for the purpose of incendiarism.”

Tagore was careful to avoid the ugliest side of patriotism. “In small minds, patriotism dissociates itself from the higher ideal of humanity. It becomes the magnification of self, on a stupendous scale—magnifying our vulgarity, cruelty, greed, dethroning God, to put up this bloated self in its place.” Tagore never agreed to forsake the complete Man, the moral Man, in his kernel of patriotism.

The problem of the age is this that mankind must realise unity, and the first step towards this realisation is to create opportunities for revealing the different peoples to one another. The meeting of the East and the West has remained incomplete, because the occasions of it have not been disinterested. The deepest source of all calamities is misunderstanding, and therefore Tagore felt that “the East, for its own sake and for the sake of the world, must

not remain unrevealed." The intellectual mind of the West is revealed to the world ; the East must also collect its own scattered lamps and offer them to the enlightenment of the world. This is the age of co-ordination and co-operation. "The seedlings that were reared within narrow plots must now be transplanted into the open fields." It is, therefore, necessary for the East to base her own structure on a synthesis of all the different cultures which she has. It will be a tragic day if the East feebly imitates the West and discards her own culture ; she will thereby make herself superfluous, cheap and ludicrous. It will be no real gain if the whole world grows into an exaggerated West.

Tagore significantly observed :

"Our society exists to remind us, through its various voices, that the ultimate truth in man is not in his intellect or his possessions ; it is in his illumination of mind, in his extension of sympathy across all barriers of caste and colour ; in his recognition of the world, not merely as a storehouse of power, but as a habitation of man's spirit with its eternal music of beauty and its inner light of the divine presence."<sup>1</sup>

This world is not alien to us ; when we know it to be an alien, we emphasise its mechanical aspect. This mechanical view has its place, but it is to be known and mastered. India has taken the view that reality has three phases : Sat (the fact that things are), Chit (the fact that we know), Ananda (the fact that we enjoy). The fact is that there is the relationship of common existence, there is the relationship of knowledge, and there is the relationship of love. The basis of Tagore's internationalism lies in his realisation that "the Infinite, for its self-expression, comes down into the manifoldness of the Finite ; and the Finite, for its self-realisation, must rise into the unity of the Infinite."<sup>2</sup> Then only is the cycle of Truth complete.

Most patriotic poems dethrone the unity of creation. "They are like hill streams born of sudden showers, which

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Unity*, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

are more proud of their rocky beds than of their water currents ; in them the athletic and arrogant subject takes it for granted that the poem is there to give it occasion to display its powers."<sup>1</sup> Tagore's patriotic poems were attuned to the chord of universality. He loved his country in the context of humanity ; he advocated the cause of his country in the background of universal freedom ; he fought for his country in the pursuit of world peace.

Tagore's poem, entitled "India's Prayer,"<sup>2</sup> written on the occasion of the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1917 and recited by him at its sitting, is fully representative of his concept of patriotism. It was stressed that "in thy name we oppose the power that would plant its banner upon our soul" and that "thy light grows dim in the heart that bears its insult of bondage". He knew that "weakness is the traitor who betrays our soul" and that "life, when it becomes feeble, timidly yields thy throne to untruth." Tagore thus wrote :

"Let this be our prayer to thee—

Give us power to resist pleasure where it enslaves us,  
To lift our sorrow up to thee as the summer holds its  
midday sun,  
Make us strong that our worship may flower in love,  
and bear fruit in work.  
Make us strong that we may not insult the weak and  
the fallen,  
That we may hold our love high where all things around  
us are wooing the dust.  
They fight and kill for self-love, giving it thy name  
They fight for hunger that thrives on brother's flesh,  
They fight against thine anger and die.  
But let us stand firm and suffer with strength  
for the True, for the Good, for the Eternal in Man,  
for thy Kingdom which is in the union of hearts,  
for the Freedom which is of the Soul."

Tagore's concept of patriotism is fascinatingly brought out

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Poems* by Rabindranath Tagore, No. 60.



in the diary of Bimala (taken from his novel, *The Home and the World*) :

"Sandip Babu deliberately started a discussion with my husband.<sup>1</sup> He (Sandip) began in a provoking way : 'So you do not allow that there is room for an appeal to the imagination in patriotic work ?'

'It has its place, Sandip, I admit, but I do not believe in giving it the whole place. I would know my country in its frank reality, and for this I am both afraid and ashamed to make use of hypnotic texts of patriotism.'

'What you call hypnotic texts I call truth. I truly believe my country to be my God. I worship Humanity. God manifests Himself both in man and in his country.'

'If that is what you really believe, there should be no difference for you between man and man, and so between country and country.'

'Quite true. But my powers are limited, so my worship of Humanity is continued in the worship of my country.'

'I have nothing against your worship as such, but how is it you propose to conduct your worship of God by hating other countries in which He is equally manifest ?'

'Hatred is also an adjunct of worship. Arjuna won Mahadeva's favour by wrestling with him. God will be with us in the end, if we are prepared to give Him battle.'

'If that be so, then those who are serving and those who are harming the country are both His devotees. Why, then, trouble to preach patriotism ?'

'In the case of one's own country, it is different. There the heart clearly demands worship.'

'If you push the same argument further you can say that since God is manifested in us, our self has to be worshipped before all else ; because our natural instinct claims it.'

'Look here, Nikhil, this is all merely dry logic. Can't you recognise that there is such a thing as feeling ?'

'I tell you the truth, Sandip,' my husband replied. 'It is my feelings that are outraged, whenever you try to pass off injustice as a duty, and unrighteousness as a moral ideal. The fact, that I am incapable of stealing, is not due to my possessing logical faculties, but to my having some feeling of respect for myself and love for ideals.'

'Is not the history of every country, I (Bimala) cried, 'whether England, France, Germany, or Russia, the history of stealing for the sake of one's own country ?'

<sup>1</sup> Bimala's husband, Nikhil, is the representative of Tagore's thought.

‘ They have to answer for these thefts ; they are doing so even now ; their history is not yet ended.’

‘ At any rate,’ interposed Sandip Babu, ‘ why should we not follow suit ? Let us first fill our country’s coffers with stolen goods and then take centuries, like these other countries, to answer for them, if we must. But, I ask you, where do you find this answering in history ? ’

‘ When Rome was answering for her sin no one knew it. All that time, there was apparently no limit to her prosperity. But do you not see one thing : how these political bags of theirs are bursting with lies and treacheries, breaking their backs under their weight ? ’

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‘ I do not care about fine distinctions,’ I (Bimala) broke out. ‘ I will tell you broadly what I feel. I am only human. I am covetous. I would have good things for my country. If I am obliged, I would snatch them and filch them. I have anger. I would be angry for my country’s sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults. I have my desire to be fascinated, and fascination must be supplied to me in bodily shape by my country. She must have some visible symbol casting its spell upon my mind. I would make my country a Person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga,—for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offerings. I am human, not divine.’

He (Nikhil) said to me in a very gentle voice : ‘ Neither am I Divine, I am human. And therefore I dare not permit the evil which is in me to be exaggerated into an image of my country,—never, never ! ’

The foregoing extracts clearly show that Tagore was, in fact, replying to the criticisms commonly levelled against his stand.

Tagore unburdened himself through the statement recorded by Nikhil in his diary :<sup>1</sup>

‘ What I really feel is this, that those who cannot find food for, their enthusiasm in a knowledge of their country as it actually is, or those who cannot love men just because they are men,—who must shout and defy their country in order to keep up their excitement,—they love excitement more than their country. To try to give our infatuation a higher place than Truth is a sign of inherent slavishness. Where our minds are free we find ourselves lost. Our moribund vitality must have for its rider either some fantasy, or some

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s Novel, *The Home and the World*.

one in authority, or a sanction from the pundits, in order to make it move. So long as we are impervious to truth and have to be moved by some hypnotic stimulus, we must know that we lack the capacity for self-government. Whatever may be our condition, we shall either need some imaginary ghosts or some actual machine-man to terrorise over us. . . . . They accuse me of being unimaginative,—that is, according to them, I have oil in my lamp, but no flame. Now this is exactly the accusation which I bring against them : You are dark, even as the flints are. You must come to violent conflicts and make a noise in order to produce your sparks. But their disconnected flashes merely assist your pride, and not your clear vision."

Tagore, in fact, echoed what Socrates said to Polus :

"This doctrine of yours has now been examined and found wanting. And this doctrine alone has stood the test—that we ought to be more afraid of doing than of suffering wrong ; and that the prime business of every man (and nation) is not to seem good, but to be good, in all private and public dealings."

Tagore was ever conscious that "to tyrannise for the country is to tyrannise over the country," and that "in every country man has destroyed himself to the extent that he has permitted slavery to flourish." A nation which gives itself to immoral aggrandisement is on the road to disintegration ; a nation which accepts predatory patriotism deforms its own ideal. It is pertinent to remember Seneca's rebuke to his slave-holding countrymen : "Can you complain that you have been robbed of the liberty which you have yourselves abolished in your own homes ?" Tagore's concept of patriotism reminds us of the great words of Abraham Lincoln : "With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right—let us strive on to finish the work we are in."

#### BASES OF INTERNATIONALISM

Man is an eternal wayfarer. He does not stop ; his mission is not to abandon the road. If he stands aside and builds a permanent house, he is off from his real track. "Animals have their lairs, but man has taken to the road.

Those who are great among men are the road-builders and the path-finders. The lure of the call of the infinite in him has brought man out on the way in quest of the unattained."<sup>1</sup> Man continues in his search, "not for the satisfaction of his material needs, but in order to strive with all his might for the revelation of the Universal Man in the world of men, to rescue his own innermost truth from the crude obstacles set up by himself."<sup>2</sup> Tagore was "a way-farer of an endless road," so he extended greetings to all the comrades of the road. The goal of human life, according to Tagore, was to shatter the bonds of his imprisoned self, to continue the struggle, and to offer freedom and be free. This is the base of Tagore's universalism. Discords become pronounced when the tuning of the instrument goes on, but they are not a part of the music itself. Discords jar on us ; it is harmony that Man seeks to establish ; it is for Man to transcend his self-interest. In the biting language of Rajjab, a seer of medieval India, Tagore proclaimed :

"That which conforms to all truth is truth, that which does not conform is false, this is wisdom, says Rajjab, whether it angers or pleases you."

Tagore declared his faith in Man with the following significant statement :

"In the great evolution of the Universe we have found its first significance in a cell of life, then in an animal, then in Man. From the outer universe gradually we come to the inner realm and one by one the gates of freedom are unbarred. When the screen is lifted on the appearance of Man on earth we realise the great and mysterious truth of relatedness, of the supreme unity of all that is. Only can Man declare that those who know Truth can enter into the heart of the all."<sup>3</sup>

Tagore was intensely a lover of Man, so he wrote :

"God loves to see in me, not his servant;  
but himself who serves all."

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Man*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 60-61.

He even went so far as to suggest in sarcasm that "Gods, tired of their paradise, envy man." At least he did not envy God's paradise; he dreamt of the Earth, its citizens. Tagore found God in Man; in his view, renunciation of this world would be taking one away further from God; the search for God must be done through service to mankind. In the poem "The Ascetic" Tagore wrote:

"At midnight the would-be ascetic announced:

'This is the time to give up my home and seek for God.

Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here?'

God whispered, 'I,' but the ears of the man were stopped.

With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife, peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed.

The man said, 'Who are ye that have fooled me so long?'

The voice said again, 'They are God,' but he heard it not.

The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother.

God commanded, 'Stop, fool, leave not thy home,' but still he heard not.

God sighed and complained, 'Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me?' (*The Gardener*)

Religion should be founded on love. Tagore gave a remarkable criticism of Indian life in the form of a conversation between the five elements (water, fire, earth, air and ether) in his *Panchabhuter Dayari* (Diary of the Five Elements). "The simple countryman is seen through the eyes of Rousseau and the dynamic force of life through those of Bergson."<sup>1</sup> There are sharp observations in the "Diary of the Five Elements" on Indian life indicating Tagore's thought on many problems. The central core of Tagore's religion is service to Man. In the course of a sermon on the anniversary of the foundation of the school at Santiniketan in 1909, Tagore observed:<sup>2</sup>

"Two notes have been struck from this Asram: one of the universe, the other of the soul of man. This shrine is situated at the confluence of the streams of these two notes. Both of these notes are very ancient and ever new. . . That we should look for the universal

<sup>1</sup> *Rabindranath Tagore* by Prof. V. Lesny, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 125-127.

in the individual soul, for the creator of the world in the world, are statements so extremely obvious that at first sight it would appear needless to make so much fuss and confusion over them. But this has happened again and again in the history of mankind."

Tagore prayed to God for striking at "the roots of penury in my heart," and for giving him the strength to bear his joys and sorrows and to make his love fruitful in service, without disowning the poor or bending his knees before insolent might. He left his message in the following poem :

"Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads ! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely, dark corner of a temple with doors all shut ? Open thine eyes and see, thy God is not before thee !

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and His garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like Him come down on the dusty soil !

Deliverance ? Where is this deliverance to be found ? Our Master Himself has joyfully taken upon Him the bonds of creation ; He is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense ! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained ? Meet Him and stand by Him in toil and in sweat of thy brow." (*Gitanjali*)

In another poem, Tagore exhorted people to pursue constructive work fearlessly :

"From the ocean of joy the summons has sounded to-day : Away from the shore of inactivity. All hands to work ! The boat is ready ! Put in all the cargo ! In spite of the waves the shore must be reached, even at the risk of our lives ! From the ocean of joy the summons has sounded to-day."

This call arose from the Poet's conviction that it was not necessary for Man to seek Heaven, it was Heaven which would seek fulfilment in Man himself. So he sang :

"I wandered through the emptiness of heaven like a poor pilgrim. Through the merit of past centuries I was born to-day as a son of this world, this clod of earth. To-day heaven lies in my body, in my love, in the anxiety of my heart, in my timidity and my strivings, my joys and my sorrows. Heaven shines in ever-changing colours on the waves of my life and death. To-day heaven sings in my song and has found its fulfilment in my life."

Tagore never believed in renunciation of the world ; he had his faith in self-realisation through love and acceptance of the world as it is. So he sang in one of his poems :

“ Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.” (*Gitanjali*)

In fact, in pursuance of this philosophy, he exclaimed :

“ I do not want to die in this beautiful world,

I want to live amongst mankind.

In the sunlight, in this flowering garden,

In the midst of living hearts, let me find a place.

On this earth the play of life is ever on the flow.

How much of separation and union and tearful laughter there is—

Let me build an immortal home

By weaving songs of the joys and sorrows of men.”

Tagore was a true “ Vedantist ” who felt the living presence of God in all things ; he had a constant feeling of “ the actual immanence of God in the infinitesimal atom as in the vastest system.” Tagore had much more than the mere feeling ; he sang :

“ Take me up Master-Musician ! and make me thy harp. Let your delectable fingers sweep over my heart-strings and produce divine melody.”

This Vaishnavic approach made him feel :

“ Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust,

and the steps that I heard in my playroom are the

same that are echoing from star to star.” (*Gitanjali*)

So Tagore proclaimed the dignity of Man, the discovery of reality in the world of senses and colours and ridiculed the philosophy of escapism. He found God in Man, divinity in the lowliest of the low. In the poem ‘ The Deity’s Farewell,’ Tagore told :

"Shrinking with disgust, the devotee cried,  
 Impure one, get off from here ;  
 So be it, He answered,  
 and in the twinkling of an eye,  
 the beggar assumed the Deity's form."

That was why Tagore told his countrymen passionately :

"O my unfortunate country, those whom you have insulted  
 They will drag you down to their own level,  
 Those whom you have deprived of their human rights .  
 Those who stand before but find no place in your lap,  
 They will drag you down to their own level."

Tagore's concept of Dharma sprang from his human approach to the world. He declared :

"Our Dharma is not religion ; it is not divorced from politics, separated from work, cut off from business, dissociated from daily conduct. It does not confine itself within the walls of a particular portion of society and keep a sentry over its boundaries to prevent the encroachments of recreations and amusements, poetry and literature, science and art. The stages of Brahmacharya, Garhastha, Vanaprastha etc., are so many means of fulfilling religion completely in life, in this world. Religion is not for the satisfaction of our partial needs ; the whole world exists for its fulfilment."

This concept of Dharma led him to the discovery of the truth of existence in the thoughts and feelings, the aims and movements, of human beings. So he said :

"We feel that this world is a creation ; that in its centre there is a living idea which reveals itself in an eternal symphony played on innumerable instruments, all keeping perfect time. We know that this great world-verse, that runs from sky to sky, is not made for the mere enumeration of facts ; it has its direct revelation in our delight. That delight gives us the key to the truth of existence ; it is personality acting upon personalities through incessant manifestations."

Truly to know Man is to commune with his heart and love him, proclaimed Tagore. In a poem written in 1941 which appeared in *Janmadine* (Poem No. 10) Tagore lamented that he had not won access everywhere and that he had perhaps failed to enter the intimate precincts of the tiller at the plough, the weaver at the loom, the fisherman playing his net, that is of those who toil and sustain the



world. Tagore paid his tribute to the toilers who traversed by diverse ways the endless track from life to death. "Their million voices mingle in a song, their grief and joy of everyday harmonise in a mighty hymn to Life."<sup>1</sup> In *Janmadine* (1941) Tagore stated that he had become one with the great symphony, sharing the eternal joy of being and the need of universal kinship. So he declared :

" A poet of the world am I,  
its varied voices and tunes  
would find response in my flute.  
Whenever the call had come but failed  
that void I have tried to fulfil with my dreams  
as I listened to the great harmony  
of the immense world  
surging through the silent hours  
into the recesses of my heart."

Tagore did not preach the divinity of Man as a religious thinker ; this truth was revealed to him. It was related by Tagore in *The Religion of Man* :

" On that morning in the village the facts of my life suddenly appeared to me in a luminous unity of truth.....I felt that I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man, in which the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation."<sup>2</sup>

Tagore in the Hibbert lectures for 1930 delivered at Manchester College in Oxford (published under the title *The Religion of Man*) recounted his religious experiences. In the Kamala lectures at Calcutta University on *Manuser Dharma*, he pointed out the bases of his approach to religion which were influenced by the best traditions of Hindu thought. The lectures delivered by him at Andhra University (published under the title *Man* in 1937) conveyed his message to man, for mankind, analysing " the essence of man's mission and significance of human life." His religion was " a poet's religion," not that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. To

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Arogya* (1941), a book of poems.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's *The Religion of Man*, p. 96.

quote Tagore, "its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of my songs." His religion was founded on spiritual experience and revelation. "It is a sort of higher subjectivism, and has much in common with Bergson's *elan vital* and American pragmatism, more particularly Willian James's moralism."<sup>1</sup> Tagore believed in the development of human personality, in the advent of the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>2</sup> God is not a being enthroned in heaven, but a Spirit concealed on earth, in Man, in everything. He did not believe in a personal God. "The process of his (Tagore's) development is in harmony with the tradition of Indian philosophy : from insight into the beauty of nature he arrived at a feeling of confidence in the destiny of mankind ; from a conviction of the nobility of man's mission in the world he derives a wise philosophy, which culminates in his unhesitatingly positive attitude towards life and in his later conception of the divine nature of mankind. He is not interested in heaven or celestial deities. It is in this world that man's progress towards perfection must take place, and therefore life in this world is the object of his pre-occupations."<sup>3</sup> Dean Inge has rightly said that "the centre of gravity in religion has shifted from authority to experience." Tagore relied on his religious experience.

Tagore was all along sustained by his robust faith in Man. On the eighty-first birthday anniversary in 1941 Tagore gave out a message to his countrymen wherein he observed :

"As I look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilisation strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice."

<sup>1</sup> Prof. V. Lesny's *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> "Religion is universal to the human race ; wherever justice and charity have the force of law and ordinance, there is God's kingdom"—Spinoza.

<sup>3</sup> Prof. V. Lesny's *Rabindranath Tagore*, Pp. 285-86,

The cataclysm, so far as the physical aspect of the scourge of the second world war (1939-1945) is concerned, is over, but Man is not shedding the insolence of might, and abandoning unrighteousness. Tagore believed that mankind must be bound together by the inevitable and inescapable moral links which strengthen the fabric of civilisation. The sureness of human progress in the upward path of struggle and travail is jeopardised to-day. The reality of human brotherhood, based on peace, and the will to act justly can only be achieved by thinkers of the world. Tagore was one of such thinkers whose life and work were inspired by a spirit of harmony.

It is true that the greed of unashamed national glorification is inflicting heavy and fatal wounds on human conscience, but Tagore did not feel despondent, because "Man has never stopped in his urge for self-expression, in his brave quest of knowledge." The citadels of international federation are constantly assaulted, but "there is the stirring of human conscience to which we must look for a reassertion of man in religion, in political and economic affairs, in the spheres of education and social intercourse." Innumerable individuals in every land are ready to stake their all for raising a new structure of human civilisation on the foundation of international understanding and fellowship. In this fact lies the great hope of humanity, and Tagore believed that brighter spirits would accept the challenge of our times. He was also happy to find a great awakening in India "under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi's singular purity of will and conduct which is creating a new generation of clear-minded servers of our peoples." He observed: "To these individuals of every land and race, these youthful spirits burning like clean flames on the altar of humanity, I offer my obeisance from the sunset-crested end of my road."

Relationship is the fundamental truth of the world. Creation is possible through the continual self-surrender of the unit to the universe. "He (Man) misses himself when

isolated ; he finds his own larger and truer self in his wide human relationship. His multicellular body is born and it dies ; his multi-personal humanity is immortal.”<sup>1</sup>

It is the instinctive desire of Man that in our ideal life we must touch all men and all times through the manifestation of a truth which is eternal and universal. This is a mentality superfluous for biological existence.<sup>2</sup> He thus feels something beyond the evident fact of himself. That is, Man is truly represented in something which exceeds himself. This “surplus in Man” was frankly and fully recognised by Tagore. So he could urge : “The realism in Man is the animal in him, whose life is a mere duration of time ; the human in him is his reality which has life everlasting for its background.”<sup>3</sup>

Tagore was keenly conscious that there was in Man the mutual relationship of the infinite being and the finite self. There are both of these aspects in Man himself, the objective one with its business of life, the subjective one with its disinterested joy of vision. Birds repeat their single notes, or a very simple combination of them, but Man builds his world of music and establishes ever new rhythmic relationship of notes. That is Man’s nature, and civilisation is the expression of the universal Man. The Chinese sage Lao-tze truly said : “One who may die, but will not perish, has life everlasting.”

But unfortunately men have come close together in the present age, not in a spirit of harmony and understanding. Intense race antagonism has brought about “an epidemic of moral perversity,” resulting in the “universal churning up of jealousy, greed, hatred and mutual suspicion.” “Every people, weak or strong, is constantly indulging in a violent dream of rendering itself thoroughly hurtful to others. In this galloping competition of hurtfulness, on the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s *The Religion of Man*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* P. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* P. 127.

slope of a bottomless pit, no nation dares to stop or slow down. A scarlet fever with a raging temperature has attacked the entire body of mankind, and political passion has taken the place of creative personality in all departments of life.”<sup>1</sup>

It is a fact of epic significance that Man’s true power lies in yielding up his brute power for the freedom of spirit. Tagore sent out his message to all nations of the world to “claim the right of manhood to be friends of men, and not the right of a particular proud race or nation.” So he urged :

“I ask once again, let us, the dreamers of the East and the West, keep our faith in the Life that creates and not in the machine that constructs—in the power that hides its force and blossoms in beauty, and not in the power that bares its arms and chuckles at its capacity to make itself obnoxious. Let us know that the Machine is good when it helps, but not so when it exploits life ; that Science is great when it destroys evil, but not when the two enter into unholy alliance.”<sup>2</sup>

Tagore was a great optimist, so he refused to think that “the twin spirits of the East and the West, the Mary and Martha, can never meet to make perfect the realisation of truth.” He said that he would wait patiently for “this meeting.” In his view, the normal progress of the human soul is from “individual body to community, from community to universe, from universe to Infinity.”

Tagore had all along believed in the human conception of the universe. To quote Tagore, “my religion is in the reconciliation of the Super-personal Man, the universal human spirit, in my own individual being.”<sup>3</sup> Tagore felt and proclaimed :

“The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s *The Religion of Man*, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 163-64.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from a conversation between Tagore and Einstein in July 1930 (published in the Appendix of *The Religion of Man*).

earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment." (*Gitanjali*).

Tagore's internationalism was thus founded on certain fundamental beliefs. On an analysis of Tagore's philosophy, the following can be put forward as some of the basic foundations :

1. Life becomes untrue and its burden heavy if "we donot see ourselves in the Infinite ; we have to realise the consciousness of the all." Man, whose inner vision is bathed in an illumination of his consciousness, at once realises the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all differences of races, and his mind no longer awkwardly stumbles over individual facts of separateness in the human world. The true universal finds its manifestation in the individuality which is true. "The true universalism is not the breaking down of the walls of one's own house, but the offering of hospitality to one's guests and neighbours." According to Tagore, we must show, each in our own civilisation, that which is universal.

2. "Our heart is like a fountain. So long as it is driven through the narrow channel of self it is full of fear and doubt and sorrow ; for then it is dark and does not know its end. But when it comes down unto the open, on the bosom of the all, then it glistens in the light and sings in the joy of freedom."<sup>1</sup>

3. "Stung by the insult of cruel injustice, we try to repudiate Europe, but by doing so we insult ourselves. Let us have the dignity not to quarrel or retaliate, not to pay back smallness by being small ourselves."

4. "Our fight is a spiritual fight—it is for Man. We are to emancipate Man from the meshes that he himself has

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. W. W. Pearson, December 11, 1918.

woven round him—these organisations of national egoism . . . . We, the famished ragged ragamuffins of the East, are to win freedom for all humanity.”<sup>1</sup> Tagore emphasised that “he alone knows the reality who sees the universe in one’s self and one’s self in the universe. The real state of our soul is not that of its imprisonment within the limits of its ego. The only spiritual discipline for a great nation is that of making itself familiar and friendly with the rest of the universe.”<sup>2</sup>

5. “Let it be known that it is only through the amelioration of the lot of all individuals in all countries, that real progress can come. People who remain in darkness are being exploited, and this is becoming a problem for which the whole world is responsible. So long as men are willing to suck the life of humanity to swell up their own wealth and power, humanity will go down to its extermination.”<sup>3</sup> Tagore stressed that “if in the night only my lamp is lit and the rest of the world is dark, the lamp has no real illumination for me.”

6. The most outstanding fact of our age is that “the drama of our destiny to-day has the whole world for its stage.” Tagore had his faith in the solidarity of the human races ; he was anxious to act upon a broadly human basis of behaviour. The politicians mishandle the world situation according to their tradition of nationalistic fanaticism, but Tagore’s aspiration was to bridge the widely gaping gulf between the East and the West.

7. “We must realise that every nation is a member of humanity and each must render an account of what it has created for the weal of mankind. By the measure of such contribution does each nation gain its place. When any nation loses its creative power, it hangs like a

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, March 2, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore’s Address on Greater India in 1927.

<sup>3</sup> Tagore’s talk with Governor Yen of Shansi, China, (reported in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1924).

paralysed limb, for there is no virtue in mere continued existence.”<sup>1</sup>

Tagore sought to create in his educational colony at Santiniketan “a spirit of genuine international collaboration based on a definite pursuit of knowledge, a pursuit carried on in an atmosphere of friendly community life, harmonised with Nature, and offering freedom of individual self-expression.” Tagore announced his faith which refused to accept national vain-gloriousness in preference to the love of truth. He wrote to Professor Gilbert Murray in 1934 :

“To me the mere political necessity is unimportant ; it is for the sake of our humanity, for the full growth of our soul, that we must turn our mind towards the ideal of the spiritual unity of man. We must use our social strength, not to guard ourselves against the touch of others, considering it as contamination, but generously to extend hospitality to the world, taking all risks, however numerous and grave. We must manfully accept the responsibility of moral freedom, which disdains to barricade itself within dead formulæ of external regulation, timidly seeking its security in utter stagnation. Men who live in dread of the spirit of enquiry and lack of courage to launch out in the adventure of truth, can never achieve freedom in any department of life. Freedom is not for those who are not lovers of freedom and who only allow it standing space in the porter’s vestibule for the sake of some temporary purpose, while worshipping, in the inner shrine of their life, the spirit of blind obedience.”

### DOCTRINE OF NATURAL RIGHT

Liberty is the noblest faculty of man. It reduces man to the level of the brute, a mere slave of instinct, if one’s liberty is renounced, divested of or transferred to the other. The doctrine of natural right suggests that every man is permitted to enjoy life and liberty, and no one has a right to divest himself of life and liberty. By giving up liberty and by accepting serfdom we degrade our being ; by giving up our life we do injustice to it. “And, as no temporal good can indemnify us for the loss of either, it

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s *Swadeshi Samaj* (written in 1904).



would be an offence against both reason and nature to renounce them at any price whatsoever.”<sup>1</sup> To quote, Rousseau, “jurists, who have gravely determined that the child of a slave comes into the world a slave, have decided, in other words, that a man shall come into the world not a man.” Liberty being a gift which we hold from nature, our forefathers have no right whatever to deprive us of it. But we stand to-day denuded of liberty, of our freedom to shape the scheme of things in the interests of India and Indians. The political slavery is an offence against both reason and nature, and Tagore built up the doctrine of natural right, so far as the question of political freedom for India was concerned.

Tagore's doctrine of natural right is based on the postulate that the responsibility of Government, whatever its system may be, must be to the people of the country, so that they might look on it as their own. “If the Government be entirely of the outside, the indifference to it of the people is bound to lead to disaffection, and disaffection suppressed from outside festers into hatred and contempt, making the problems so arising progressively more and more complex.”<sup>2</sup> Tagore was emphatic on the point that the most powerful nation on earth could not keep an unnatural order of things upheld to the end by the thrust of its bayonets. “The weight is bound to tell more and more heavily, till at length its arms are benumbed and the gravitational pull of the world at large levels the outrage against nature to the dust.”<sup>3</sup> His belief is nursed by the hope that “none in all the wide world have the power to keep bound, like an animal for sacrifice, the strength to suffer, the strength for renunciation, the strength of righteousness.” We must, therefore, “make peace in our strength, with others in their strength. Let not our strength be begged or borrowed, it must be the infinite strength to suffer for Right and Justice.”

<sup>1</sup> A discourse on the Origin of Inequality, by J. J. Rousseau.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's article on *Choto-o-Baro* (The Great and the Small).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The doctrine of natural right can hardly flourish in a world where there is injustice, oppression at every step. Tagore therefore exclaimed :

“ Have I not seen secret malignance strike down the helpless under the cover of hypocritical right ?

Have I not heard the silenced voice of Justice weeping in solitude at might's defiant outrages ?

Have I not seen in what agony reckless youth, running mad, has vainly shattered its life against insensitive rocks ? ’ (*Fugitive*).

He felt his voice choked and songs silenced, and he asked Lord in tears : “ Hast thou Thyself forgiven, hast even Thou loved those who are poisoning Thy air, and blotting out Thy light ? ” This is really an evil day when rights are mutilated, not recognised. Man to-day has no peace,—his heart is arid with pride.

To continue the existence as “ the eternal rag-picker at the other people's dustbins ” is the greatest shame of a country. In Tagore's conception, the doctrine of natural right took a peculiar contour. In one of his political lectures in Bengali in 1313 (B.S.), Tagore enunciated the doctrine of natural right in the following significant way :

“ No one can take away the blessed task of service to the country—it is God-given ; self-rule is eternally within our grasp. The British king may guard us by police force, may administer justice in coloured uniforms, may prove helpful or antagonistic as and when occasion arises, but he can hardly prejudice our natural and inherent right to serve and enrich our country through our work. If we do not take up the work, we lose the right. It is all to our shame if we lose the natural right of service and throw blame on others for the non-discharge of our own duties. It is sad and unfortunate that while we ourselves refrain from service and sacrifice, we expect the mitigation of distress from those who do not feel the natural urge to love and serve but only to throw favours out of pity. . . . It is needless to state that I do not belong to those who run about on metalled high roads with memorials of petition or protest before Government and consider this to be the primary work for the country.”

The doctrine of natural right which Tagore enunciated was based fundamentally on the thesis that no Power could really conquer or snatch away our own country, nor could

an outside Power hand over our country to us. In proportion we lose our natural right to serve, the foreign conquest becomes oppressive to that extent. If the idea gain ground that foreign Government is the only agency for the removal of wants, we lose the country effectively. The real malaise is not that India is under foreign rule but that her citizens have not made the country their own through the vehicle of service, sacrifice, understanding and knowledge. Tagore could not, therefore, accept the proposition that our service and sacrifice would flow on the introduction of political freedom, as "real love finds expression in sacrifice through service in scorn of fair or foul conditions—the more it vibrates when it meets with obstacles." It was painfully surprising, as was urged by Tagore, that we had remained indifferent to the basic deficiencies which had rent our society into countless divisions and deadened our minds with unmeaning traditions. To postpone service till the "swaraj" dawns is a kind of self-deception—it is merely an invitation to the perpetuation of our political slavery. Hence, the natural and inherent right to love and serve our country exists, as it will thereby restore life and mobility to our society and lay the foundation of a better order of things.

In *Swadeshi Samaj* Tagore touched on the most tragic effect of British rule in India. In his analysis, India's loss, consequent on British rule, lies in the fact it has widened the gulf between the city and the village and that India's social "swaraj" is torn to shreds. In India, towns were only administrative centres serving certain special purposes while "for the complete purposes of the people's life the villages were cherished and served by all the capable persons of the land with the most of their means and the best that their minds produced." Tagore longed for the day when villages would again be in intimate contact with the manifold culture of India, and he was keen on bringing back life in its completeness into the villages "making them self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural

tradition of their own country, and competent to make an efficient use of the modern resources for the improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic condition." The village is at present not the partner of the city; it is degraded to the position of a maid-servant offering to the ungrateful town cheerless and unintelligent labour. "It should be our mission," as Tagore said, "to restore the full circulation of blood into those maltreated limbs of society, to bring to the villages health and knowledge." This is to be studied not as a move for ruralisation but as activation of the life-centre of India which is found in the villages.

Truth and freedom are for all. Tagore asked the British Government to "leave us alone to our destiny, let us solve our own problem in the light of experiments and efforts and necessary sufferings."<sup>1</sup> He believed that "we must face reality in our own way so that we may exploit the full potentialities of our people."<sup>2</sup> Europe has struggled through her dark periods at immense sufferings and sacrifices to a people's right to self-rule. We shall also have to do that, but political slavery is to go. No country can and should be ruled against its will by another. "The dark facts of our bankruptcy are evident to any casual visitor," and the truth is that Indians should not be denied human rights. So in one of his patriotic songs, he urged his countrymen to carry on the struggle :

" If they answer not to thy call walk alone,  
 If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall,  
 O thou of evil luck,  
 Open thy mind and speak out alone.  
 If they turn away, and desert you when  
     crossing the wilderness,  
 O thou of evil luck,  
     trample the thorns under thy thread,  
     and along the blood-lined track travel alone.  
 If they do not hold up the light  
     when the night is troubled with storm,

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article in *Unity* (Chicago) of 30th January 1933.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

O thou of evil luck,  
with the thunder flame of pain ignite thine own heart  
and let it burn alone." (*Poems*).

Tagore could give such a resurgent call to his countrymen to face sufferings and to move onward, because he believed honestly and realised fully that Indians could not long be denied their right to self-rule. In the heat of the anti-partition agitation in Bengal in 1905, Tagore composed the following song (with reference to British domination of India) which he himself sang through the streets of Calcutta, heading a huge procession :

"Shalt thou cut asunder this Fate-forged bond ?  
Art thou indeed so mighty ?  
Art thou so mighty ?  
To break us and build, shall thy hand avail ?  
Art thou indeed so haughty ?  
Art thou so **haughty** ?  
Shalt thou for ever chain us back ?  
Shalt thou for ever hold us down ?  
Nay, so much strength you have not !  
Nay, that chain shall not hold !  
Howsoever your edicts bind,  
Even in the weak is power,  
Howsoever your greatness swells,  
God over-rules.  
When you have struck down our strength,  
You too shall surely die—  
Grown heavy and overladen, your boat shall sink."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NATION AND ITS CULT

Tagore was provoked into the discussion of the concept of a Nation by the discourse of Renan on Nationality. He wrote two articles on "What is a Nation" and "Indian Society" in Bengali in 1308 B.S. (1901). He developed his ideas on the cult of the Nation in his lectures on "Nationalism" delivered in Japan and America.

It is extremely difficult to find out the characteristics of the Nation. There is no need for racial unity. The English, the French, the German, the Italian, all of them are said to be nations, but none of them can boast of purity in race. In fact, racial purity hardly exists among any nation, and pure race is often a sterile race, an uncreative community. The political State, whenever it wields a particular community into a nation, makes no reference to racial purity or racial homogeneity. There is no need for uniformity of language. It helps national cohesion, but it is not the characteristic of nationality. The language of the U.S.A. and the U.K. is the same, but the American and the English are two different nations. The Spanish and the Spanish American may speak the same language, but they belong to two respective nations. The Swiss is a nation, although Switzerland is a land of many races speaking different languages. There is no need for the identity of religion. One's nationality is not determined by the fact if he is a Protestant, a Catholic, or an atheist. There may be need for community of economic interests. But it is not essential to wield people, so bound by identity of economic interests, into a Nation. It helps the growth of a village community, or a communal guild. Geographical boundaries do not bind people into a Nation. People are no doubt cast in the arms of nature, but the limitations of geography

do not determine national characteristics. Natural boundaries are not final in human history.

If the identity of race and descent, community of language and of religion, geographical limits do not constitute the characteristics of the Nation, what else are its characteristics? The Nation is a living reality; nationality is a psychological commodity. According to Renan, common historical antecedents and traditions and a longing to live together to preserve common hereditary customs and conventions are the features of the Nation. The truth is that historical antecedents and traditions which make one proud and the modelling of future ideal after the old pattern, to suffer together, to enjoy together, to hope for together—all these are fundamentals in the make-up of a nation, not the identity of race and language or of geographical limits.

Tagore prefaced his remarks on Nationality by stating that European unity and Hindu unity were two different concepts. The word Nation connotes a type of unity which does not exist in India, but it should not confuse us into thinking that there is no unity in Hindu civilisation. Civilisation seeks to achieve unity in diversity. This has been the basis of Indian civilisation in her own way. Europe has become great through the agency of her State. Hence, in Europe governmental cohesion and national unity are the same. The Hindu has achieved unity through his social organism. In India society is the ruling force. It is only through social solidarity that India is not yet extinct, that she is still living. This fundamental difference distinguishes India from Europe. According to Tagore, the characteristics forming a Nation are the common territory, common environment, common heredity, identity of political antecedents, common historical evolution. Judged by these tests, Indians are a nation. But Imperial propagandists have drugged us with the belief that the identity of race and descent, community of language and religion, geographical

limits, identity of political antecedents and a longing to be under the same Government—all these are essential characteristics of a Nation. Influenced by these criteria and intoxicated with the differences in religion, manners and ways of living, Mr. M. A. Jinnah has maintained and held that Moslems and Hindus are the two major nations. If nationality is a subjective psychological feeling, the Moslem may argue that as he has no longing to belong to Government wherein the Hindu will dominate, that separates him from the large embrace of common nationality with the Hindu. But by the test of the community of culture,<sup>1</sup> the Hindu and the Moslem in India are one. Tagore brought all the citizens of India under the term “the Hindu”, and as such they all came under the definition of the Hindu Nation. “The history of India does not belong to one particular race but to a process of creation to which various races of the world contributed—the Dravidians and the Aryans, the ancient Greeks and the Persians, the Mahammedans of the West and those of central Asia.”<sup>2</sup>

### WHAT THE “NATION” MEANS

Tagore wrote in 1308 B. S. (1901)<sup>3</sup>

“The word Nation does not occur in our language, nor does it exist in the country. We have learnt of late to prize national greatness by virtue of European education. But its ideals cannot be found in our minds. Our history, our religion, our society, our family, none of them have recognised the ascendancy of the cult of the Nation. Europe prizes political independence; we set store by spiritual liberation. . . . The civilisation as manifested in the cult of the Nation has yet to be tested. But it is clear that its ideals are not

<sup>1</sup> Stalin recognises the psychological make-up, manifested in a community, of culture as one of the main characteristics of a Nation. (*Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*).

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's *Nationalism*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Tagore's essay on *Prachya-o-Pashchatya Sahhyata* (Eastern and Western Civilisation), *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 4.



ennobling ; they carry the evils of injustice and falsehood ; there is a sort of terrible cruelty about the cult. . . . The basis of Hindu civilisation is society ; the basis of European civilisation is the State. Man can attain greatness either through society or through the State. But if we ever think that to build up the Nation after European pattern is the only way open and the only aim of humanity, we shall be wrong."

The game of a Western Nation-State is to "dance jazz dances over the misery and degradation of fellow-beings of a different colour from their own." That breeds Imperialism which dictates them not only to steal the lands of others but to steal the limbs of the people who are outside the pale of their nationalities. "Possibly they believe that moral laws have special domesticated breed of comfortable concessions for the service of the people in power." Tagore's concept of the nation, however, took a peculiar contour. He found that "the people are living beings. They have their distinct personalities. But nations are organisations of power."<sup>1</sup> There was thus a fight between the living spirit of the people and the methods of nation-organising. The living personalities have their self-expression, and necessarily their distinctive creations. But "the nations do not create, they merely produce and destroy." For production organisation is necessary. Men specialise their knowledge and organise their power to come to the front ; that is professionalism. The cult of the Nation is the professionalism of the people. The Nation forever watches to take advantage of the elemental forces of the crowd mind, crowd psychology, by fostering in the popular mind unreasoning pride in their own race and hatred of others. Nationalism is the training of whole people for a narrow ideal. In India professions were considered primarily as social necessities and as the means of livelihood for individuals ; they were kept within limits by social regulation. The ideals in our social institutions were two-fold—the regulation of human passions and appetites for the

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Unity*.

harmonious development of man and the cultivation of disinterested love for his fellow-creatures. According to Tagore, our history is the fulfilment of our social life and the attainment of spiritual ideals. In the West national machinery of commerce and politics "compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value, but they are bound in iron hoops, labelled and separated off with scientific care and precision."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore in his analysis found that "the ideal of the social man is unselfishness, but the ideal of the Nation, like that of the professional man, is selfishness." The tragedy does not lie in the fact that the Nation is constantly increasing its power to pursue its self-interests, but when the Nation tries to pass off the cult of collective selfishness as a moral duty, it not only commits depredation, but attacks the very vitals of humanity. Men are taught that the Nation is greater than people. It is helped by the showy talk of patriotism. Tagore proclaimed that "the spirit of national selfishness is the brain disease of a people which shows itself in red eyes and clenched fists, in violence of talk and movement, all the while shattering its natural restorative powers." But the moral faculty of sympathy and co-operation is the guiding spirit of social vitality, its function being the maintenance of a beneficent relation of harmony with its surroundings.

Tagore called India a land of the No-Nation for the following reasons<sup>2</sup> :

1. "A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organised for a mechanical purpose." India has been trying to accomplish her task through social regulation of differences ; she is not organised for political and economic aggrandisement. In the West the organisation of politics and commerce, whose other

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Nationalism*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*.

name is the Nation, is all powerful at the cost of the harmony of higher social life.

2. India has never had a real sense of nationalism. The West solves the problem of race-conflict by shutting doors against aliens or reducing them to slavery. In India social instincts imposed restrictions on the spirit of conflict. She has to accommodate differences in race, in religion. India's history has been the history of continual social adjustment and not that of organised power for defence and aggression.

3. In India there is no common birthright. In the West the nations there do not have that physical repulsion, one for the other, that we have between different castes. "Have we an instance in the whole world where a people who are not allowed to mingle their blood shed their blood for one another except by co-ercion or for mercenary purposes? And can we ever hope that these moral barriers against our race amalgamation will not stand in the way of our political unity?"

4. It is to be recognised that social restrictions in the given state of society are tyrannical, so much so as to make men cowards. The social habit of mind impels us to live a life of untruth. It is sure to persist in our political organisation. People used to live in social hypocrisy cannot but be tyrannous and untruthful and morally cowards in political life. In this wise, social stagnation deadens political solidarity which is the antithesis of national and communal cohesion. The immobility of our social structure atrophies political activity and canalises it into the blind lane of fragmentariness.

#### THE CULT OF THE NATION

Tagore's analysis of the cult of the Nation demonstrates clearly why and how India is a land of the No-Nation. The cult of a Nation is summed up in the following lines of Tagore :

"The Nation, with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns, its blasphemous prayers in the churches, and the literary mock thunders of its patriotic bragging, cannot hide the fact that the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation, that all its precautions are against it, and any new birth of its fellow in the world is always followed in its mind by the dread of a new peril. Its one wish is to trade on the feebleness of the rest of the world, like some insects that are bred in the paralysed flesh of victims kept just enough alive to make them toothsome and nutritious. Therefore, it is ready to send its poisonous fluid into the vitals of the other living peoples, who, not being nations, are harmless. For this the Nation has had and still has its richest pasture in Asia."

These words Tagore uttered in 1916 in his lectures on Nationalism. They are now finding support amongst political thinkers of to-day. It is accepted that nationalism breeds Imperialism. It is being recognised slowly that the excesses of nationalism must be curbed. Either we must think internationally, or we must perish; either we must control the actions of sovereign Nation-States or they will destroy civilisation—these murmurs are now audible in the West, and Western political thinkers have to think of the world-community, the *civitas maxima*, as the starting-point of the social adventure. The incompatibility of this nationalism with civilisation is recognised. To quote Professor Laski, "a world of competing nation-States, each of which is a law unto itself, produces a civilisation incapable of survival. For the law between those States is the law of the jungle. It is instinct, at every point, with hate and fear and insecurity."

There is an internal as well as external side to the problem of nationalism. There is a struggle for power within them. Tagore, therefore, showed that the Nation-States had hindered the development of higher humanity and made the Nations powerful but not free. He characterised the European war of Nations as "the war of retribution," and he, therefore, pleaded that the time had come when, for the sake of the whole outraged world, Europe should fully know in her own person the terrible

absurdity of the thing called the Nation. Are not the present political thinkers of the West becoming keenly conscious that "the Nation has thriven long upon mutilated humanity?" Tagore is now finding support for his thesis that the interference with the total well-being of the *civitas maxima* must be stopped. He persisted in believing that "there is such a thing as the harmony of completeness in humanity" and that "civilisation must take its stand upon its basis of social co-operation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict."

The cult of the Nation seeks to utilise crowd psychology for creating a tremendous amount of power; it turns men into machines of power and trains the crowd mind for the special purpose of the ruling men. "The individual thinks, even when he feels; but the same individual, when he feels with the crowd, does not reason at all. His moral sense becomes blurred. This supersession of higher humanity in crowd minds is productive of enormous strength. For the crowd mind is essentially primitive; its forces are elemental. The Nation is forever watching to take advantage of this enormous power of darkness." Tagore found that the mob-mind which was allowed the enjoyment of an apparent liberty in the West was, in fact, curtailed on every side. "The people are drugged with the hashes of false hopes and urged to deeds of frightfulness by the goadings of manufactured panics; their higher feelings are exploited by devious channels of unctuous hypocrisy, their pockets picked under anaesthetics of flattery, their very psychology affected by a conspiracy of money and unscrupulous diplomacy."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore's lecture against predatory nationalism and militarism in the Imperial University of Tokio in 1916 gave deep offence to Japan, and he was criticised there as the poet of a defeated nation. Tagore could not but state that "the cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong,

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, p. 134.

the greed of fat prosperity, the rancour of the wronged pride of race, and insult to Man, have burst God's peace, raging in storm." The war of 1914 gave him intense suffering. So he wrote :

" All the black evils in the world have overflowed  
their banks ;  
Yet, oarsmen, take your places with the blessing  
of sorrow in your souls !  
Whom do you blame, brothers ? Bow your heads  
down !  
The sin has been yours and ours."

The world's disaster aroused him against the system of industrial capitalism which he denounced in his lectures on "Nationalism." He accepted the charge that he was the Poet of a defeated nation, and he wrote in one of his exquisite poems :

" My Master has bid me, while I stand at the roadside, to sing  
the song of Defeat, for that is the bride whom He woos in secret.

She has put on the dark veil, hiding her face from the crowd,  
but the jewel glows on her breast in the dark.

She is forsaken of the day, and God's night is waiting for her  
with its lamps lighted and its flowers wet with dew.

But the stars are singing the love-song of the Eternal to a face  
sweet with shame and suffering.      ..

The door has been opened in the lonely chamber,  
the call has sounded, and the heart of the darkness  
throbs with awe because of the coming tryst."<sup>1</sup>

*(Fruit-Gathering)*

Tagore's protest against "Westernisation" and sympathy with the message of Asia are often misunderstood. Tagore

<sup>1</sup> It may be mentioned, in this context, that Tagore's lectures on Nationalism were responsible for the establishment of spiritual relationship between Romain Rolland and the Poet. Rolland's message coincided with that of Tagore: "We serve Truth alone which is free, with no frontiers, with no limits, with no prejudices of race or caste. We shall work for humanity but for it as a whole. We do not recognise nations. We recognise the People—one and universal—the people who suffer, who struggle, who fall and rise again, and who ever march forward on the rough road, drenched with their sweat and their blood,—the people comprising all men, all equally our brothers."

made himself clear in a letter to the poet Yone Noguchi of Japan<sup>1</sup> :

"I have believed in the message of Asia, but I never dreamt that this message could be identified with deeds which brought exaltation to the heart of Tamer Lane at his terrible efficiency in man-slaughter. When I protested against "Westernisation" in my lectures in Japan, I contrasted the rapacious Imperialism which some of the Nations of Europe were cultivating with the ideal of perfection preached by Buddha and Christ, with the great heritages of culture and good neighbourliness that went to the making of Asiatic and other civilisations. . . . The doctrine of "Asia for Asia," which you enunciate in your letter, as an instrument of political blackmail, has all the virtues of the lesser Europe which I repudiate and nothing of the larger humanity that makes us one across the barriers of political labels and divisions."

It is, however, to be noted that Tagore's significant protest against Japan's aggressive war on China bore fruit in fullness of time. In the year 1938 Tagore wrote in the same letter :

"I know that one day the disillusionment of your people will be complete, and through laborious centuries they will have to clear the debris of their civilisation wrought to ruin by their own war-lords run amok. They will realise that the aggressive war on China is insignificant as compared to the destruction of the inner spirit of chivalry of Japan which is proceeding with a ferocious severity. China is unconquerable ; her civilisation, under the dauntless leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek, is displaying marvellous resources."

Tagore was of the opinion that "all civilisations are creations. They do not merely offer us information about themselves, but give outer expression to some inner ideals which are creative. Therefore, we judge each civilisation, not by how much it has produced, but by what idea it expresses in its activities. When, in things which are creations, the structure gets the better of the spirit, then it is condemned. When a civilisation merely gives a large stock of facts about its own productions, its mechanical parts, its outward successes, then we know that there must be anarchy in its world of ideas, that some living part is

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's reply to Yone Noguchi's letter in 1899.

lacking, that it will be torn with conflicts and will not be able to hold together human society in the spirit of truth."

In the scheme of things there is the spirit of fight, and the spirit of harmony. The civilisation that fights and conquers for man, and the civilisation that realises for him the fundamental unity in the depth of existence, are complementary to each other. When they join hands, human nature finds its balance.

Tagore's *Muktadhara* (The Waterfall) is a drama of great literary grace with a reasoned and allegorical presentation of his convictions on modern politics. "His deep distrust of all government by machinery and of all prostitution of science to serve violence and oppression, his hatred of a slavish system of education, his scorn of race-hatred and of all politics which seek to make one tribe dependent on another instead of risking the gift of the fullest freedom, his certitude that it is in freedom that God is found,—all these are so prominent that each may with justice be claimed as the play's message. Through all, as a tender undertone, runs the murmur of the Free Current, a haunting sound in the soul of the boy whose foster-mother she was and whose lifeless body, after he has broken her fetters, her waves are to carry majestically away."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore himself had, and liked, the freedom of the "Free Current." So he sang :

"I find Thy will knows no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart ; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders." (*Gitanjali*).

Tagore had all along refused to remain stagnant and to be encaged within the walls of a particular creed. So he preached no cult of his own ; he had moved on and on, and his voyage had never come to an end in blind channels.

In the West people are flattered into believing that they are free, and that they have the sovereign power in their

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edward Thompson's *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 284.



hands. But this power is strangled by hosts of self-seekers. Tagore complained that the thoughts of the people were fashioned according to the plans of organised interest, and in the choosing of ideas and the forming of opinions they were hindered by some punitive force or by the constant insinuation of untruths; they were made to dwell in an artificial world of hypnotic phrases. In fact, the ideal of true freedom has become tenuous in the atmosphere of the West. "He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them. He who distrusts freedom in others loses his moral right to it. Sooner or later he is lured into the meshes of physical and moral servility." In the West human lives are offered as fuel, keeping up the steam-power.

#### SOULLESS INDUSTRIALISATION

The following dialogue taken from Tagore's *Red Oleanders* (a drama in one Act) represents the Poet's protest against soulless industrialisation :

"Nandini—The living heart of the earth gives itself up in love and life and beauty, but when you rend its bosom and disturb the dead, you bring up with your booty the curse of its dark demon, blind and hard, cruel and envious. Don't you see everybody here is either angry, or suspicious, or afraid ?

Voice—Curse ?

Nandini—Yes, the curse of grabbing and killing.

Voice—But we bring up strength.

\* . \* \* \*

Nandini—You have no end of things, yet why always covet ?

Voice—All I possess is so much dead weight. No increase of gold can create a particle of a touchstone ; no increase of power can ever come up to youth. I can only guard by force. If I had Ranjan's youth I could leave you free and yet hold you fast. My time is spent in knitting the binding rope, but, alas, everything else can be kept tied, except joy.

Nandini—It is you who entangle yourself in your own net, then why keep on fretting.

Voice—You will never understand. I, who am a desert, stretch out my hand to you, a tiny blade of grass, and cry : I am here, I am weary. The flaming thirst of this desert licks up one fertile field after another, only to enlarge itself,—it can never annex the life of the frailiest of grasses.

\* \* \* \*

Nandini—You have cut yourself off from everybody and so deprived yourself.

Voice—I keep myself apart, that it may become easy for me to plunder the world's big treasure-houses.

\* \* \* \*

Voice—I long savagely to prove to you how cruel I am. Have you never heard moans from inside my room ?

Nandini—I have. Whose moaning was it ?

Voice—The hidden mystery of life, wrenched away by me, bewails its torn ties. To get fire from a tree you have to burn it. Nandini, there is fire within you too, red fire. One day I shall burn you and extract that also.

Nandini—Oh, you are cruel !

Voice—I must either gather or scatter. I can feel no pity for what I do not get. Breaking is a fierce kind of getting."

Abnormal congestion of wealth, red with aggressive inflammation, is the malady of the age, and according to Tagore, "the sound process of treatment is never through a destructive mutilation which always fails to reach the root, leaving the wound of its own making to fester, but through a stimulation of the natural circulation of national property, thereby helping the inner spirit of recovery to do its work in the depth of the social constitution."<sup>1</sup> He favoured the introduction of the co-operative principle in economic life. He urged that "the huge megatherium of capitalism with its stupendous tail of bought-up workers will naturally become extinct when individual men come to realise their

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's Presidential Address on the International Co-operator's Day at Calcutta in 1927.

own truth,—not through the indecent exaggeration of their exclusive wealth, but through a combination of their individuality founded upon mutual trust and understanding.”<sup>1</sup> The isolated disproportion of wealth is “barbarous,” as characterised by Tagore, and it will become civilised when it evolves the true fulfilment of its power of co-operation. Iniquitous greed and unseemly scrimmage of competition disturb the natural circulation of wealth, as they comprise “the dark continent of primitive nature.” It is co-operation which represents the highest truth of man.

Marx says: “The capitalist mode of production and appropriation, and hence capitalist private property, is the first negation of individual private property founded on the labours of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of the negation.” Marx pointed out the dangers inherent in the centralisation of capital which was helped by the development of large-scale industry founded on machine. The problem that awaits solution is that “accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of miseries, agony of tail, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation at the opposite pole.” The Marxist argues that “the seizure of the means of production of society puts an end to commodity production, and therewith to the domination of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by conscious organisation on a planned basis. The struggle for individual existence comes to an end. And at this point in a certain sense, man finally cuts himself off from the animal world, leaves the condition of animal existence behind him and enters conditions which are really human.”<sup>2</sup>

Tagore was equally anxious to bring about conditions which would encourage “humanity’s leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom.” He was extremely

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Engels’ *Anti-Duhring*.

distrustful of machine civilisation where man reigns supreme "with teeth and claws bared in fierce struggle and relentless competition." He instinctively felt that the real fight was with massed and congested wealth. So he condemned the mania for profit, and in his superb and biting style he observed :

"Everywhere has the profiteer's bushel hidden the light of the truth of man. Man's starved heart is being ridden to death by his corpulent pocket racing over a path of profit that has no terminus. Never in the history of the world has all-devouring avarice organised such a universal orgy for its own repletion. The passions which are the enemies of the soul work their purpose by hiding from the view the wholeness of man. Lust makes us look on the flesh to the exclusion of the soul. Greed draws our attention to the possessions to the exclusion of owners. Pride causes the self to ignore all others. There is one more of the enemies which is negative in its aspect—this is feebleness of vision. . . . The profit-making age is vulgar. It sneers but it does not know how to smile."

But he was confident that "the huge megatherium of capitalism" would come to an end through mutual sympathy, trust and understanding. The Marxist pleads for "conscious organisation on a planned basis," but Tagore, distrustful of exclusiveness, also pleaded for mutual co-operation. "Whatever is richest in man's life comes from mutual co-operation." He argued the case for the establishment of the principles of humanism. Civilisation should take its stand upon the basis of co-operation and discard the gluttonous kind of living. Tagore's wholeness, comprehensiveness, sense of rhythm—all this does not and cannot line him up with the advocates of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as he believed that "it is individuals who have always helped humanity. Civilisation is the creation of great individuals. It has not been created by big institutions." Nor has he announced that "people" should be understood in the Marxian sense, that is the proletariat.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Proletarian now means one whose only means of livelihood is the sale of his labour power.

Tagore was, however, not indifferent to the necessity, as preached by the Marxist, that "society is to take control of the means of production," if society becomes the meeting ground of all social forces synthetised into an organic whole. Every note, seemingly discordant, is necessary to the completeness of symphony, and "people differently situated should bring their different products into the market of humanity, each of which is complementary and necessary to the other."<sup>1</sup> He drew his inspiration from the spirit of the teachings of the Upanishads which may be stated as follows :

"In order to find Him you must embrace all. In the pursuit of wealth you really give up everything to gain a few things, and that is the way to attain Him who is completeness."

Tagore undoubtedly pleaded for moral basis in material prosperity, but he was keen on accepting the thesis that "moral civilisation cannot be good and final in itself, it can only be healthy when it makes it possible for material civilisation to attain its highest purpose."<sup>2</sup>

Private property, with Tagore, is "a medium for the expression of our personality."<sup>3</sup> There is a negative aspect of this personality, and there man is selfish. But its positive aspect reveals the truth, "that it is the only medium through which men can communicate with one another." Hence, he complained that "if we kill individuality because it is apt to be selfish, then human communion itself loses its meaning. But if we allow it to remain and develop, then being creative by nature, it must fashion its own world. Most often and for most men, property is the only frame that can give a foundation for such creation of a personal world. It is not merely money, not merely furniture ; it does not represent merely acquisitiveness, but is an objective manifestation of our taste, our imagination,

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Sadhana*.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's talk with Governor Yen of Shansi, China.

<sup>3</sup> Article on *City and Village*, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1924.

our constructive faculties, our desire for self-sacrifice.”<sup>1</sup> Tagore believed that “our highest social training is to make our property the richest expression of the best in us, of that which is universal, of our individuality whose greatest illumination is love.”<sup>2</sup> Property is the unit of wealth that makes for communal prosperity when it is alive to its function. He was, however, intensely critical when property had changed its positive aspect. It shuts the gate of hospitality, which is the best means of social inter-communication, and displays its wealth in an extravagance which is self-centred ; it becomes anti-social, begetting envy and irreconcilable class division. To-day, “property breaks social bonds ; it drains the life sap of the community. Its unscrupulousness plays havoc all over the world, generating forces that can coax and coerce peoples to deeds of injustice and wholesale horror.”<sup>3</sup>

It is all very well to talk of such political or moral slogans as “Property is theft” or “Jealousy is the very devil,” but Tagore knew that the passions of possession and jealousy were one of “the ultimate facts of life.” The need is the readjustment of possessions among individuals or classes to the improvement of social foundations.<sup>4</sup> The joy of possession must be replaced by the joy of creation, and that was what Tagore advocated. Landlords may be extirpated, but those who are forward in extirpation of landlords will turn out to be equally anti-social, unless the minds are taught and disciplined for social service. It is greed that makes landlords forget their duties ; it is jealousy that moves others to attack landlords. Both are unhelpful for the required service. The fundamental problem, according to Tagore, is to make people know how to live and to serve.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Havelock Ellis puts : “All life is a craving for possession, and jealousy is merely the crude instinct to guard that craving and to defend possessions. It is a mistake to suppose that any socialist or communist order to society alters that fundamental fact.”

Tagore's concept of property has fundamental resemblance to the analysis of Prof. R. H. Tawney in his work *The Acquisitive Society*, first published in 1921. Both of them recognise the need for emphasising the social quality of economic activity. It implies that the foundation of society should be found not in rights but in functions, that rights should be deducible from the discharge of functions, that property should not be an absolute right on an individual basis. In short, property and economic activity exist to promote the ends of society. They disdained the acquisitive society which was intent on the acquisition of wealth without discharging services and pleaded for functional society which aimed at making the acquisition of wealth contingent upon the discharge of social obligations, which enquired not what men possessed but what they could make or create or achieve. Professor R. H. Tawney put the case of functional society by emphasising that "all rights, in short, are conditional and derivative, because all power should be conditional and derivative. They are derived from the end or purpose of the society in which they exist. They are conditional on being used to contribute to the attainment of that end, not to thwart it. And this means in practice that, if society is to be healthy, men must regard themselves not as the owners of rights, but as trustees for the discharge of functions and the instruments of social purpose." Similarly when property is merely an instrument for the acquisition of gain or the exercise of power, it is "im-property," as suggested by Mr. Hobson; but when it is an aid to creative work, to social service, it is active, functional. "In society, as in the whole world of organic life, atrophy is but one stage removed from death." Functionless property appears natural to those who believe that society is organised merely for the acquisition of private wealth. In fact, as Tawney put it, "functionless property is the greatest enemy of legitimate property itself. It is the parasite which kills the organism that produced it." Rights without functions are "like the

shades in Homer, which drank blood but scattered trembling at the voice of a man." Tagore thought on similar lines.<sup>1</sup>

The rights of nations and individuals can or should never be absolute ; they must be suffused with social contents. So long as men move on the plane of self-centred instinct, there is no solution. The struggle for self-aggrandisement cannot be beautiful and cannot but be self-destruction. To quote Professor R. H. Tawney who echoes Tagore in the analysis of nationalism, " the perversion of nationalism is imperialism, and the perversion of individualism is industrialism." He pointed out that " nationalism is, in fact, the counterpart among nations of what individualism is within them. It has similar origins and tendencies, similar triumphs and defects. For nationalism, like individualism, lays its emphasis on the rights of separate units, not on their subordination to common obligations, though its units are races or nations, not individual men. Like individualism it appeals to the self-assertive instincts, to which it promises opportunities of unlimited expansion. Like individualism it is a force of immense explosive power."<sup>2</sup>

The magnificent gift from Mussolini of an almost complete library of Italian literature for the Santiniketan school and Tagore's visit to Mussolini in 1926 created a lot of confusion in public mind if Tagore had any sympathy for Fascist ideals. It was accentuated by his appreciation of Mussolini's striking personality. Tagore in his letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews (published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1926) made his position clear. The following is quoted from the letter :

" It is absurd to imagine that I could ever support a movement (meaning Fascism) which ruthlessly suppresses freedom of expression, enforces observances that are against individual conscience,

<sup>1</sup> In this connection, Tagore's foreword to Pramatha Chaudhuri's *Raiyeter Katha* may be consulted.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Tawney's *The Acquisitive Society*, Pp. 50-51.



and walks through a blood-stained path of violence. I have said it over and again that the aggressive spirit of nationalism and Imperialism, religiously cultivated by most of the nations of the West, is a menace to the whole world. The demoralisation which it produces in European politics is sure to have disastrous effects especially upon the peoples of the East, who are helpless to resist the Western methods of exploitation. . . . . The Fascist organs are evidently fascinated by the prospect of the economic self-aggrandisement of the nation at the cost of the moral self-respect of the people. But is it not the killing of the goose for the sake of the golden eggs ? ”<sup>1</sup>

Tagore did always lament the unilateral development of the West, that is laying emphasis on the things that are of the outside world. The development of inner life is also necessary. He advocated the process of reconciliation of the material and the spiritual life through conflict. Science has opened up the store-house of power, but in the West the spiritual aspect has been put more and more in the shade and in the East the opportunities of achieving material wealth are ignored.

Tagore differentiated man's ambition from his aspiration. Ambition is an arithmetical progress ; it goes on adding to the parts. But aspiration seeks growth as a whole ; it maintains the balance of proportion, the poetry of limits. “ A society, that produces a hugeness of organisation in its politics, commerce, religion, education and amusement, which fetters its living limbs and smothers the movement of its spiritual expression, continually builds itself its own tomb, albeit for the time being this appears like its tower of victory.”<sup>2</sup> This crowding of the non-essential, which like a noxious weed grows only to choke the essential into insignificance, is encouraged in the modern age, and Tagore called it “ a constant process of suicide,” and ridiculed the new reverence for “ the Deity of the Multi-

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's interview with the wife of Professor Salvadori (an Italian exile) is clear on the point. It is published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1926.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's essay on *The Rule of the Giant* (published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, July 1926.)

plication Table." He found that "the adorers of the big ignore the value of the human," and that "their infatuation produces the tragic mentality that has its worshipful tenderness for the automaton." His complaint was that "life is being constantly bled white for swelling the girth of that which is not life, which is against life." His passionate fondness for simple living and graceful dignity is criticised by those who are drunk with greed, lust and mania for complex organisations losing communion with life. Tagore is ridiculed by them as "a reactionary," as he blamed the "hydra-headed tyranny of the non-human." He, on the other hand, believed that life, when it had unity with its agents, its materials, could find efficiency without losing freedom. He stood for the expression of human personality; he advocated the subordination of non-living tools in the scheme of things; he appreciated thinking minds, throbbing hearts and rhythmic hands; he fought against obedience to the unmeaning traditions that were dead, against all imitations that only succeeded in increasing intellectual and moral snobbishness. To quote Tagore, "I believe in life, only when it is progressive; and in progress, only when it is harmony with life. I preach the freedom of man from the servitude of the fetish of hugeness, the non-human. I refuse to be styled an enemy of enlightenment because I do not stand on the side of the giant who swallows life, but on the side of Jack, the human, who defies the big, and wins victory at the end."<sup>1</sup>

### THE EAST AND THE WEST

We have arrived at a stage in the order of civilisation when we can hardly ignore the world even if we want to. This recognition pursued Tagore in all his activities. That was the base of his internationalism, and it was supported by his governing belief in the continuity of history, the unity

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

of man and in the profundity of all sublime teachings. He stated that "the human races will never again be able to go back to their citadels of high-walled exclusiveness. They have been exposed to each other, physically and intellectually. The shells, which have so long given them full security within their individual enclosures, have been broken, and by no artificial process can they be mended again. So we have to accept this fact even though we have not yet fully adapted our minds to this changed environment of publicity, even though through it we may have to run all the risks entailed by the wider expansion of life's freedom." The great fact of this age is that the human races have come together; the doors have burst open; the bars have given way. We are, therefore, to prove our worth to the whole world.

It is true that the courage to run all risks may land people in difficulties, may afflict them with wounds, may make the human race restless. But it is these rash and courageous people who can find out the path to life and prosperity. They know how to die; they can also master the mysteries of living. Tagore was an ardent admirer of this abundance of life which was creative. This abundance must pervade all corners of human activities. There are no watertight compartments in the field of action. The morning sun must light up all the lanes and the by-lanes of human activities. It is wrong, it is sinful, if we seek to accept life-force in the political sphere and stagnation on the social front. That is not possible, nor is it sound. Tagore ridiculed those who favoured revolutionary growth in specified departments of life but who encouraged the traditional approach in certain others. Real awakening must embrace all aspects of life. Tagore in his essay on *Bibechana-o-Abibechana* (Wisdom and Thoughtlessness) written in 1321 B.S. elaborated his standpoint significantly.

Europe is great because she has not lost faith in humanity. Europe may have discarded formal religion; she may have made a wrong use of science, abuse of machines,

but "in Europe the ideals of human activity are truly of the soul. They are not paralysed by shackles of scriptural injunctions. Their sanction lies in the heart of man and not in something external to him. It is this attitude of mind in Europe which is essentially spiritual." Western humanity is scientific and humanistic; it is not sectarian. "The stream of water in a river does carry sand, but so long as the stream can still flow it will push away the sand from its own path. If the mental attitude is right we need not be afraid of mistakes."<sup>1</sup> The individual in the West has no irrational injunctions to keep him in internment away from the wide world of men. That is the merit of the West which fascinated Tagore.

Tagore had never been weary of repeating that India had evolved her civilisation on distinctive lines. Those special characteristics must be grasped if India is to be known and understood. It is true that the modern age is insensate with craze for work; it knows no rest, and it disdains any relaxation. To die in harness is a pride in Europe. Europe likes to exhaust herself in restlessness. When a Nation is overpowered by this mad fury of action, it affects peace in the world. Europe is restlessly moving about. India, on the other hand, has never been slave to action; she did not exalt action which threatened to menace relationship with man; in fact, she had regulated her activities within the bounds of control by setting greater value on actions pursued without any eye to reward or profit. If we can uproot the desire for reward, the poisonous fangs of human activities are scotched. In this wise, man can cease to be slave to action. But this serene attitude was disturbed when India came into contact with the West.

India had another speciality, that is her loneliness. She was not exclusive; she did not avoid contact with others; but she preferred to work alone. This loneliness is to be earned; it is difficult to attain, still more difficult to

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Prof. Gilbert Murray, 1934.

preserve it. But our ancestors have given this rich treasure to India. India looked at foreigners without excitement ; she did not strike them, nor did she wound them ; she met them in an atmosphere of glad acceptance. India did not obstruct foreigners ; like creepers she made room for them under her shade. Those who are not attracted by this spirit of loneliness can hardly appreciate her. For ages India was torn asunder by the ravages of foreign conquests, but she was well protected by her spirit of loneliness which should not be confused with the spirit of insularity. Without wars and battles India knew the art of keeping herself unaffected and undisturbed. That was why she remained unmoved in the midst of conflicts and revolutions ; and that was why she had not broken down, she was not extinct, and she had not been swallowed up.

Europe is alone in enjoyment, but organised in work ; India is organised in enjoyment, but she works single-handed. In Europe the riches and comforts of individuals are private, but her charities, education, trades and industries—all are carried on in an organised manner. In India, property, comforts, all are to be shared, but our charity and education are the responsibilities of private individuals.

Tagore did not believe that this spirit of loneliness was to be torn asunder in our interests. If India's trades had decayed, that had been due not to the lack of power of organised action, but to the absence of improved machinery. The power of organisation makes people slave to machine, and screens the merciless exploitation of human labour under its veil. It is this organisation that smothers humanity, that drives away the weak from the field of competition, that starves small-scale enterprises. India had regulated the passions of hatred and greed by preferring to remain alone. He sincerely believed that India would be essentially strong if we could continue discharging her welfare-efforts in our own families, our own villages, with patience and calmness ; if we could devote ourselves to the service of the countryside, without any ostentation, in our humble way ;

if we could yoke our religion to work, and our work to peace.

Europe feels and proclaims that contentment is the sign of decay. It is true of European civilisation, but not so in the case of Indian civilisation. Tagore was not impervious to the fact that contentment might bring in immobility, and in fact, in India that immobility had been the curse of the present-day life, but we should not lose sight of the fact that the whirlwind of unregulated desires which was desolating Europe would equally be fatal. All this should not make us forget that discipline, control, forgiveness are but the bases of higher civilisation. In the famous essay on *Swadeshi Samaj* in 1904 Tagore pointed out that the inherent, the *Sanatan dharma* of India was the realisation of unity in diversity, the establishment of a synthesis amidst variety. India does not admit difference to be the cause of conflict, nor does she find an enemy in every stranger. She repels none, destroys none. She abjures no methods, recognises the greatness of all ideals; and she seeks to bring them all into one grand harmony. According to Tagore, this was the God-given function of India.

Tagore did not hesitate to acknowledge that Western humanity had received its mission to be the teacher of the world. Her science, her learning, all this is the torch-bearer of modernism. But the West is failing to blend and harmonise; it is enslaving or killing individuals to drug a great people with soul-killing poison. Moreover, "the wriggling tentacles of a cold-blooded utilitarianism, with which the West has grasped all the easily yielding succulent portions of the East, are causing pain and indignation throughout the Eastern countries. The West comes to us, not with the imagination and sympathy that unite and create, but with a shock of passion—passion for power and wealth. This passion is a mere force, which has in it the principle of separation, of conflict."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, P. 98...

The West has met the East ; the world is offered to the West for liberation. But the East remains unexplored, misunderstood. The West is raising thorny hedges of exclusiveness and offering human sacrifices to national self-seeking. "It has intensified the mutual feelings of envy among Western races themselves, as they fight over their spoils and display a carnivorous pride in their snarling rows of teeth."<sup>1</sup> The West has not sent out its humanity to meet the man in the East, but only its machine. When it has, the meeting yielded creative results, but the West has ignored the man in the East and clung to the importation of machine. Tagore changed Kipling's line into this :

"Man is man, machine is machine  
And never the twain shall wed."

He further observed :<sup>2</sup>

"I do not deny the utility of organisation, the wisdom of acting collectively. There is work which requires organised strength, which needs discussion by many. Europe has become strong through the agency of organised efforts in war and politics, trade and commerce. That is in the nature of Europe. So Europe shows organised charity and not personal charity, offers prayers collectively and not individually, makes sacrifices in an organised manner and not personal sacrifices. Europe has not the patience of discharging duty single-handed. But our society makes it obligatory for every individual to perform his duty in his individual capacity. Europe organises committees and meetings in the observance of religious duties. In Europe the communities perform all responsibilities and obligations whereas individuals run after selfish pursuits. In collective action the one helps the other, but in individual action that mutual help is lacking. As we believe in individual action, our ideal teaches every individual to regulate his selfish instinct and brutish impulse and to think for the welfare of others. In Europe, the seeking of social welfare is the concern of the organised community, but not of the individual. This individualist approach may be refined by education, expanded by experience and improved by knowledge, but we need not destroy it, nor should we feel ashamed for it. In spheres where collective action

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* P. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Baroari Mangal* (Welfare of the Public) written in 1908 B. S. (Rabindra-Rachansvali, vol. 4).

will yield better results, we should certainly go in for it, but in spheres where it is unnecessary and improper, we should not have it, merely for the fun of it or on the intoxication of it."

Tagore undoubtedly had faith in collective action, but organisational or partisan basis was not favoured by him. He lamented :

"To fulfil one's self in his own action, to find reward in his individual efforts, all this no longer holds the field. The good work which is not advertised makes at present no appeal to us. It explains why our homes are forsaken, our villages infected with disease, our village ponds polluted. All our efforts are confined to the meetings and to newspaper publicity. Brotherly feeling does no longer embrace the brother, charity is finding publicity in the Press and in the extension of mercy to the poor, and the spirit of service is in search of governmental recognition and not humanity."

His lament is particularly pathetic when we find India intoxicated with the wine of Western collectivism which is failing to create. That collectivism is often another version of forcible parasitism which is causing to the moral nature of the West a gradual atrophy and degeneration can hardly be denied.

When the mind awakes, it begins to move onwards. While it moves, it knows to discard the obstacles that impede movement. One who moves cannot accept the bondage that obstructs him. It is only accepted when one stops, sits and waits to forge obstacles to one's movement. Indian society is immobile, so it accepts bondage; we do not want to construct, so we go on obeying. The West is moving; it pulsates with life; it is invigorating in its work; it flows in the tide of activities, so it does not stagnate. So when we Eastern people blame them for insensate movement, the West does not protest. But it does not cease from work; it goes on, and the vital life-force goads the West on from work to work. It has no time to weave obstacles to its movement, so the problem is with the inactive, with him who has sank down in the pool of quagmire which knows no flow. "The rich who has no reputation to lean on, no work to sustain him, needs flatterers



most, otherwise how can he carry the burden of his immobility? The golden advice to him will be that this stagnation is to be shaken off and that he should devote himself to some kind of work. But the courtier will advise him, Lord, you have sat reclining on the cushion of ancient traditions; you should not move to keep up the dignity of your family." So our society is immobile; there is no work, but there is bravado all around. If it seeks to move forward, it meets with obstacles at every step. Tagore admired the West because it had abundance of life, because it believed in work. He criticised where the West had fallen off from creative ideals in the pursuit of work, but he idolised the West when it knew no rest, forged no obstacles to movement and accepted nothing without reasoning. The blind habit of mind, the indifference to work in apprehension of mistakes, all this received the greatest condemnation from him. It is in the nature of life to assert itself, to brave dangers, to move on in scorn of difficulties. All civilisations have been built up by the indomitable mind. The courage may be rash, but the mind that is powerful knows no obstacles, the intellect that is bold accepts no blind faith, the ambition that is insurmountable disdains all difficulties. Tagore in his penetrating analysis got at the fundamental differences between European society and Indian society. He observed :<sup>1</sup>

"The cult of riches is inequality. Knowledge, religion, art, all this can be shared and enjoyed; it is not thereby reduced. But money is to be earned by exploiting others, and it is to be safeguarded by denying others. Hence, those who desire wealth create poverty in their own interests. Thus, when differences appear in society because of the inequality of wealth, the capitalist does not seek to abolish inequality in toto. And when that inequality assumes a dangerous form, the capitalist wants merely to ward off the danger by fair or foul means. Hence, in the West the greater the working class is asserting itself, the more it is being silenced by a lullaby; the working class is sought to be deceived by small crumbs of favour. Some say, let their housing conditions be improved;

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Tagore's essay on *Loka-Hit* (Social Welfare) in 1321 B.S.

some say, let them be given food ; others say, let them be fondled by pleasant treatment ; some suggest, let them be given more comforts. In this wise, the masses begin to writhe in pain in the huge net of riches. If the pressure of wealth were not great, they would not be knit so well together, and they would not attain any class consciousness. Now in the West the masses are not mere enumerations in the Census report, they are a force. They do not beg ; they claim. Hence, they could not be forgotten ; they raise problems for all. . . . But in our country people have not known themselves, so they could not make others know them. We know them through English books and show pity unto them ; that does not make people strong, nor is such knowledge fruitful. Their wants and sufferings are detached and personal. If it were known to them that their individual sufferings are parts of the sufferings of humanity, then society would have been confronted with real problems. Society would have sought to solve the problems in its own interests."

Europe has conquered the world by her science ; she has roused the sleeping faculties of man. Science has gained for Europe the victory in the field of action. But Europe came to Asia not with her science but with her desire. So the door to our heart is closed. "Today she is weighed down with anxiety when at length her pride of prowess, her conceit of science, her lust of exploitation, which she cultivated at the expense of the world at large, has come to bear fruit within her own borders. The conflagration that she started in the forest has turned towards her own home."<sup>1</sup> There is thus the need for the union of Science and Religion. In effect, it means that the final unity of Man must be spiritual and rational at the same time.

Greed is shameless ; it prides itself on its own shabbiness. The West is dominated by the self-seeking spirit ; in the intoxication of continual accumulation of material, it dances the devil-dance. But greed has a corpulent sister,—inertia. "A hysteric activity is the mark of greed ; but inertia is her opposite,—she cannot bestir itself for the sake of adorn-

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter written *On The Way to Java* (Published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1927).

ment, or even in getting rid of dirt,—her ugliness is of inaction.” The West is showing the shamelessness of “slavering passions,” showing triumph and the craving for self-gratification, exhausting herself in insensate desires, envy, anger, pride and self-delusion. On the other hand, ugly inertia is destroying the dignity of man in India ; it is depriving our life of its pristine beauty. The shop-keeping instinct of Europe and the insensibility of India,—both are to be revitalised into creative agencies for the progress and welfare of man. The cult of rebellion is the essence of being. Life must not be encaged within the closed doors and windows of its prison walls of dust. “Those races of men in whom this capacity for rebellion was the strongest, the most irrepressible, they have dominated history from age to age, not merely by the extent, but with the intensity of their existence.”<sup>1</sup> The challenge of times must be accepted ; it must not be evaded. According to Tagore, the West and the East, both have gone wrong ; the one is moving on lines where religion is divorced from science, and the other is stagnant. Tagore invoked Nataraja, the Divine Dancer, to dance the dance of creation, breaking the bondage of obscurity. The following is from the invocation song :

“Let the links of my shackles snap at every step of thy dance, O Lord of dancing, and let my heart wake in the freedom of the eternal voice. Let it feel the touch of that foot that ever sets swinging the lotus-seat of the muse ; and with its perfume maddens the air through ages.

“Rebellious atoms are subdued into forms at thy dance-time, the suns and planets,—anklets of light,—twirl round thy moving feet, and, age after age, Things struggle to wake from dark slumber, through pain of life, into consciousness, and the ocean of thy bliss breaks out in tumults of suffering and joy.”

Tagore had an instinctive attraction for the West. “He regarded the East as in danger of stagnating, unless roused by the practical activities of the West ; he also

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

regarded the West as in danger of rushing over precipices of ruin and destruction, unless steadied and helped by the calmer wisdom and older experience of the East." East and West must be united in mutual respect.

Western civilisation is largely based on applied science. It is the application of science which more than any other feature differentiates Western civilisation from the civilisation of India. The future of civilisation depends not on whether it can incorporate into itself scientific inventions, as Western civilisation is doing, but on the progressive application of science. Tagore stood for scientific ideas and a scientific outlook. Religion, society, institution, all decline in the absence of scientific ideas and a scientific outlook. The future of civilisation is bright if it can assimilate the scientific point of view, and not merely apply and promote scientific inventions which are all helpful for ensuring better conditions of living. He was interested in human life. Through the help of scientific inventions people are moving towards the mechanisation of life and the standardisation of man. Tagore did not appreciate it, because he could not accept economic efficiency as the principal virtue, irrespective of the fact if the benefits go to private individuals or to the State. The central postulate of Tagore is corroborated by Bertrand Russell when he observes :

"If a scientific civilisation is to be a good civilisation it is necessary that increase in knowledge should be accompanied by increase in wisdom. I mean by wisdom a right conception of the ends of life. Increase of science by itself, therefore, is not enough to guarantee any genuine progress, though it provides one of the ingredients which progress requires."<sup>1</sup>

No man who has the scientific temper can afford to be dogmatic, far less domineering in the imposition of one's opinion on the other. What is now believed in science is not exactly right ; one is merely "on the road towards the exact truth. When a change occurs in science, from

<sup>1</sup> *The Scientific Outlook* by Bertrand Russell, p. 12.

Newton's law of gravitation to Einstein's, what had been done is not overthrown, but is replaced by something slightly more accurate." All scientific laws rest upon induction which cannot give certainty. Tagore had the requisite scientific temper, so he could show the way to truth, even though "truth is unattainable."

India has been dragged by the West behind its chariot, "choked by the dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness, and overwhelmed by the speed." But the question is, if the chariot-drive is progress. Tagore refused to measure progress by the speed with which materials are multiplying. "Horse-power drives, spirit-power sustains. That which drives is called the principle of progress, that which sustains we call dharma."<sup>1</sup> It is this dharma, the creative ideal of civilisation, which is to be preserved. "Progress which is not related to an inner ideal, but to an attraction which is external, seeks to satisfy our endless claims. But civilisation, which is an ideal, gives us power and joy to fulfil our obligations."<sup>2</sup> Our living society should have "dance in its steps, music in its voice, beauty in its limbs." Western civilisation under the tyranny of prolific greed is jostling and creaking on the road.

Tagore believed that "life is a flow of harmony that unites the in and the out." Life does not store up but assimilates, does not construct but creates. According to Tagore, the source of all great evils in society, in Government, in other organisations, is in the alienation of the being from its outer habitation. When the materials of our surroundings are not living, when they are fixed habits and

<sup>1</sup> *Talks in China* (published in 1925, but the Poet's tour in China was in 1924).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Tagore quoted with approval Lao-tze who spoke the following about the good man: "He quickens, but owns not. He acts, but claims not. Merit he accomplishes, but dwells not on it. Since he does not dwell on it, it will never leave him." To have reached the complete assimilation of truth proves a long process of civilisation. Plato urged that "an intelligent and socialised community will continue to grow only as long as it can remain a unit."

hoarded possessions, our life and the world become separated. When there is unbalanced excess of passion in the materials of our own world, its distribution of weight goes wrong, and it constantly oppresses the wholeness of our life. Perfect harmony of relationship arises from perfect freedom. Freedom can never be negative ; it can never lie in a mere severance of bondage ; it is in the fulfilment of its relation to all creations. The most individualistic of human beings who own no responsibility are the savages. Freedom from the segregation of an eclipsed life can be had by those who cultivate mutual understanding and co-operation. "The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship."

Tagore was pained to find that India was the land of sectarianism and cheap asceticism. In his view, cheap asceticism supervenes, where the store of energy runs low. "The type of renunciation that results, means only a shaking off of responsibility from one's own shoulders, a fatalistic submission to discomfort, disease, or whatever else it may be. Consolation is then sought in the attempt to make out that there is something glorious in such submission. On the other hand, he who has abundance of energy takes delight in accepting the challenge of strenuous aims ; he lives forcefully." Accordingly, he could not think much of the cheap asceticism of modern India, immobile and inactive. Religion is not ritualism ; it means the evolving of right conduct which establishes the right centre for life's activities. It maintains "the true standard of value for the objects of our striving and inspires in us the spirit of renunciation which is the spirit of humanity."

It should be recognised that "life is original, it is adventurous ; it seeks itself in endless experiments ; it is the outcome of its spontaneous creative impulse. The people who passively lend themselves to imitation prove that life has lost its best claim on their hearts. That is why, when we try to imitate some other people's history, we remain so pathetically unaware of the absurdities that are produced."

Life is rebellious. It grows by breaking the forms that enclose it. If the spirit of rebellion, which is the spirit of life, is checked, the tyranny of form becomes supreme, the words become more sacred than spirit, the custom assumes more importance than reason. Therefore, Truth must have its full expression in the movement itself,—in the current which leaps over the fixed boundaries of the finite and can suggest the indefinable, the infinite. “The river of Truth’s ideals, which once sprang in the East from the ever wakeful personalities of great souls, has in course of centuries become stagnant, its flow of inspiration choked by the reeds and rubbish of a lazy imagination.”<sup>1</sup>

The awful burden of the past that we see in India must be shaken off. Tagore ridiculed plagiarism from our own past life and also plagiarism from other people’s life. “Life frees itself through its growth and not through its borrowing.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, he urged: “Let the awakening of the East drive us consciously to discover the essential and the universal meaning in our own civilisation, to remove the debris from its path, to rescue it from its bondage of stagnation that produces impurities, to make it a channel of communication for all human races.”<sup>3</sup>

The East need not slavishly follow the West where life is “like an iceberg tottering under the weight of its growing hugeness.”<sup>4</sup> The rhythm in the movement, the balance in the speed, all this is likely to be upset by the rebellious nature of Life on the principle of dialectics in thought and action. But there must be rhythm of control and freedom of spirit. Tagore quoted approvingly the following lines from the great mystic poet of mediaeval India:

“The jewel is lost in the mud,  
and all are seeking for it;

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s lecture in China in 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Some look for it in the east, and some in the west ;  
 some in the water and some amongst stones.  
 But the servant Kabir has appraised it at its true value,  
 and has wrapped it with care  
 in a corner of the mantle of his own heart."

He was pained to find that "the one outstanding visible relationship of Europe with Asia is that of exploitation." Thus its origins are commercial and material. Accordingly, we fail to establish direct human kinship with the West. When India was brought into touch with the West, she was fascinated by her art and literature, inspired with Europe's gospel of liberty, but slowly human relationship gave way to Britain's earning of dividends, administration of the Empire and extension of commerce. In our traffic with the West we fail to reach whatever is finest in Europe. "It is on account of this fact, and in order to retain her self-respect, that the whole of Asia to-day denies the moral superiority of Europe."

Tagore, however, warned his countrymen against judging Europe in this external aspect. In Europe the ideals of human activity are not paralysed by the shackles of scriptural injunctions. Man in the West is pouring forth his life for knowledge, for the land of his birth, and for the service of humanity. This attitude of mind in Europe is, according to Tagore, spiritual, "and true spirituality always brings freedom with it."

Tagore put his case thus : "The freedom that Europe has achieved today in action, in knowledge, in literature and in art, is a freedom from the rigid inanity of matter. The fetters, that we forge in the name of religion, enchain the spiritual man more securely than even worldly ties. The home of freedom is in the spirit of man. That spirit refuses to recognise any limit either to action, or to knowledge."<sup>1</sup> It is true that there are evils in Europe against which the Poet has raised his protest, but the significant

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's interview given in Canada in 1929.



thing to remember is that in Europe the evils are not stagnant.<sup>1</sup> In the West the spiritual force in man is ever trying to come to grip. "The germs of disease are everywhere, but man can resist disease only when his vital force is active and powerful." Tagore did not lose faith in the West primarily because the whole nature of man was awake there. In Europe both matter and spirit are active, but in India we have lost that spirituality. We are thus only half men, "who cripple the native majesty of the spirit before the blind repetition of unintelligent activities; who are niggardly in knowledge and palsied in action; who are ever insulting themselves by setting up a meaningless ritualism in the place of true worship; who have no difficulty whatever in believing that there is special sanctity inherent in particular forms and peculiar rites, even when their significance is neither known, nor knowable. That is why they are night and day afraid of ghosts and ghouls, gods and demons, of the calendar and stars, of inauspicious moments. Being themselves weak in spirit, they are enslaved within and enfettered in the outer world."<sup>2</sup>

The basic causes of the misunderstanding between the East and the West are, according to Tagore, produced by the fact that "Europe has come to the East, not with an ideal, but with an object that primarily concerns her own self-interest. This naturally makes the Eastern peoples suspicious and nervously eager in their turn to exploit the circumstances for their own profit, but, not having the power in their hands, and being therefore unequally matched, they cannot afford to be frank in their manner and method."<sup>3</sup>

The history of each people is the history of continual adjustment to the physical environments and social surroundings. If any element, hurtfully antagonistic, is thrust

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Tagore's letter to a European lady, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, April-July 1929.

upon a particular people, a confusion results, and the people can never show itself to its best advantage, because the process of adjustment is affected. That has been the case with India as Great Britain has not come to offer to her the best that is produced.

Progress is defined as man's conquest of his environment. But real danger arises from the fact that man has asserted his control over outside forces through dint of his invention, organisation, and construction, but he has not mastered himself. In the opinion of Tagore, emphasis on man's tumultuous energy is misplaced if the fulness of humanity is ignored. The material forces are neither moral nor immoral; they can torpedo the world into "a blood-oozing abyss of torment" or evolve a profound principle of co-operation. Goethe observed in a similar strain: "Intellectual emancipation if it does not give us at the same time control over ourselves is poisonous." Modern society, in the development of its enormous energies, has lost its poise, its balance, its rightful sense of proportion, because the creative ideas of life which are necessary for synthesising all conflicting elements are not given full play, and the ideals of social life which had given us grace, the majesty of self-mastery, and the voluntary acceptance of sufferings, are advertised as "false coins."

One should not carry the impression that Tagore has ever tried to set the materialism of the West against the spiritual qualities of the Eastern people. He had found in the West a deep substratum of spiritual thought; he had seen that the people of the West had defied death and danger for the sake of truth and knowledge. But "there must be a reconciliation of industrialism with the spirit of creation." The problem is how to establish a harmony between creative man and inventive man. The West is on the edge of an abyss, because in every department of life, men are struggling to make big profits, to capture the machinery for their own selfish ends. The remedy lies in the appeal to the humanity of man, in directing our efforts

towards the enlightenment of public opinion against selfish pursuits, against the ambitious and clever people.<sup>1</sup>

Tagore propounded his remedy with the following significant observations :

“You can never rescue humanity from this condition by organisations and institutions. It is individuals who have always helped humanity. Civilisation is the creation of great individuals. It has not been created by big institutions.”

Tagore did not lose faith in man ; he believed that in the life of the dreamers of the East and the West will be wedded East and West. He kept faith firm in the individuals who had dreamt, loved, cherished in their minds the creative belief. “Their lamps of sacrifice will burn through the stormy night along the great pilgrim tract of the future.”<sup>2</sup>

Tagore was once asked how it could be possible to fight the rapid and enormous growth of organisations “which attain their irresistible efficiency by eliminating the personal man and concentrating the mechanical one in a huge lump of system.” His answer was that “my reliance is on those individuals who have made human ideals living in their personality. They may look small and weak by the side of the power they resist, as does a plant by the side of a huge, frowning boulder. But the plant has the magic power of life. It gradually creates its own soil with its own constant emanations, and its defeat and death are a prelude to a victorious resurrection.”<sup>3</sup>

He could not accept the Marxist doctrine that morality was always a class morality and that there is no moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and immutable moral law. To quote Engels, “all former moral

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's interview in Vancouver during his visit to Canada in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> The Visva-Bharati Quarterly, October 1924.

<sup>3</sup> *Rolland and Tagore*, published by the Visva-Bharati. Tagore wrote in 1925 that human civilisations had their genesis in individuals, and they also had their protectors in them. He mentioned E. D. Morel and Romain Rolland who could never die.

theories are the product, in the last analysis, of the economic stage which society had reached at that particular epoch." Tagore, however, believed that there was a really human morality which had transcended class antagonisms, as those moral ideas were preached by men who could overcome class contradictions in their intellectual and practical life.

Tagore is accused of giving warning against the sinister growth of Nationalism, but of offering no alternative. He could not possibly suggest any final solution as "all systems produce evil sooner or later, when psychology which is at the root of them is wrong." Therefore, his first postulate is that men should try to forsake their idolatry of primitive instincts and collective passions by relying on the inner ideals of humanity, by fostering the moral spirit which has its freedom to express itself and to grow, by recognising the superior claims of social cohesion and spiritual powers of civilisation based on inter-dependence and inter-relatedness of the universe. He, therefore, put no faith in any institution but in the individuals all over the world who thought clearly, felt nobly and acted rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth. "Our moral ideals do not work with chisels and hammers. Like trees, they spread their roots in the soil and their branches in the sky, without consulting any architect for their plans."<sup>1</sup>

As nomads, ravenous and restless, men from the West have come to us. They have exploited our Eastern humanity for sheer gain of power. Thus the meeting of the East and the West has not been sufficiently creative. For man's revelation does not lie in the fact that he is a power, but that he is a spirit. Tagore stood for creative union of the East and the West.

The following passage occurs in Tagore's *Creative Unity* published in 1921 :

"The great Powers of the West are seeking peace, not by curbing their greed, or by giving up the exclusive advantages which they

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, p. 153.

have unjustly acquired, but by concentrating their forces for mutual security. Power has to be made secure not only against power but also against weakness ; for there lies the peril of its losing balance. The weak are as great a danger for the strong as quicksands for the elephant. They do not assist progress because they do not resist ; they only drag down. The people who grow accustomed to wield absolute power over others are apt to forget that by so doing they generate an unseen force which some day rends the power into pieces."

How prophetic was this statement when we read it in the modern context of the San Francisco Conference which gathered in 1945 to lay down the charter of right and freedom for the whole world. The major Powers of the United Nations that gathered there to evolve a new world organisation for the maintenance of security and peace based on freedom and justice pushed small and weak nations into the background, maintained the facade of Trusteeship with a view to exploiting the backward countries and sought to impose their will on the whole world. Tagore prophesied the doom of such a league in the following significant way : "So long as the Powers build a league on the foundation of their desire for safety, secure enjoyment of gains, consolidation of past injustice and putting of the reparation of wrongs, while their fingers still wriggle for greed and reek of blood, rifts will appear in their union ; and in future their conflicts will take greater force and magnitude." The religion of temple, by a mere change of name, and by new committees of priests, will never save mankind, painfully observed Tagore. The present situation does not arouse new hopes. The Conferences of Foreign Ministers (held in 1945 and 1946 after the San Francisco Conference has designed the framework of the new League of Nations), in fact, destroyed the last illusion that the United Nations were united and that they were planning co-operatively to build a free and harmonious world. The deadlocks and compromises at every stage shatter the declarations of a common purpose made in the Atlantic Charter and at the Conferences at

Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam, and the slogans of freedom and democracy gave way to Guile, Grab, Greed, and Gold. The Big Three (America, Britain and Soviet Russia) are thinking only of their separate national interests and their spheres of influence. The world, dominated by guile, grab, greed and gold is, in the words of Mr. H. G. Wells, "like a convoy lost in the darkness on an unknown rocky coast, with quarrelling pirates in the chart-room and savages clampering up the sides of the ships to plunder and do evil as the whim may take them."

Tagore, however, sang in full blaze of faith in humanity :

"Those who walk on the path of pride crushing the lowly life under their tread, covering the tender green of the earth with their footprints in blood ;

Let them rejoice, and thank thee, Lord, for the day is theirs.

But I am thankful that my lot lies with the humble who suffer and bear the burden of power, and hide their faces and stifle their sobs in the dark.

For every throb of their pain has pulsed in the secret depth of thy night, and every insult has been gathered into thy great silence.

And the morrow is theirs.

O Sun, rise upon the bleeding hearts blossoming in flowers of the morning, and the torch-light revelry of pride shrunken to ashes."  
(*Fruit-Gathering*) .

## CHAPTER V

### HINDU-MOSLEM RELATIONS

“Peace is true and not conflict, Love is true and not hatred ; and Truth is the One, not the disjointed multitude ”<sup>1</sup>—this sums up the contents of Tagore’s religion, his approach to life and to life’s problems. No one was more anxious to proclaim that there was need for unity based on this happy understanding. Ancient India prayed for real unity, not a parody of unity manufactured in the political or social machine. That prayer must be uttered to-day not in a full-throated voice but in thought and action ; that prayer for unity should cleanse our minds, remove all weaknesses that stand in the way. It is the basic postulate of Tagore’s philosophy that if there is a deviation from the right conduct of life in man’s work for his own self or for the family or for the country, God will not forgive him. We shall have to atone for all the misdeeds even if they are resorted to to achieve a noble end. The doctrine of the end justifying the means makes no appeal to Tagore. There is no short-cut to noble work. That was why Rabindranath Tagore treated the Hindu-Moslem problem as essentially one to be solved mainly by our own efforts and principally through mutual understanding. The problem, in his view, touches on the weakness of our psychological make-up and social organisation. He asked his countrymen, particularly his Hindu brothers, to remove the causes ; he laid no blame at the door of Moslems ; he accepted it as a historical fact that the foreign ruling Power would add to the difficulties of the situation.

The ugliness of communal conflict in India becomes apparent when it is remembered that India in olden days

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Unity*, p. 15.

put all her emphasis on the harmony that existed between the individual and the universal. Man's harmony with all is established when he realises kinship with the world. "The real misery of man is in the fact that he has not fully come out, that he is self-obsured, lost in the midst of his own desires. He cannot feel himself beyond his personal surroundings, his greater self is blotted out, his truth is unrealised." India has fallen from her own ideal, and she has grown insensible to the fact that "the ideal of truth is not in the narrow present; not in our immediate sensations, but in the consciousness of the whole which gives us a taste of what we should have in what we do have." We behave today like detached beings, losing the universal. This is the basis of conflict with the neighbour. The comprehensive view of life, the vision of the wholeness of life, is lost. We have neglected the fundamental truth that "at every step we have to take into account those other than ourselves." Tagore believed that "by clinging to the thread of self which is passing through the loom of life we cannot make it serve the purpose of the cloth into which it is being woven." That was why he reminded us of the message of Indian savants: "By unrighteousness men prosper, gain what they desire, and triumph over their enemies, but at the end they are cut off at the root and suffer extinction." Tagore, therefore, urged the self to "bend its head low in love and meekness and take its stand where great and small, all meet. It has to gain by its loss and rise by its surrender." This was not a mere philosophical speculation for Tagore; he believed in it with all sincerity, and with him "sin is not one mere act, but it is an attitude of life which takes for granted that our goal is finite, that our self is the ultimate truth, and that we are not all essentially one but exist each for his own separate individual existence." This sinful attitude of life is responsible for the disgraceful Hindu-Moslem conflict in India. Tagore's philosophy of life can best be studied from his Bengali discourses published under the title, *Santiniketan*, some of the



discourses, rendered into English, being published in *Sādhanā* (The Realisation of Life).

From the beginning of her history India has tried to live peacefully and to think deeply. "She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity."<sup>1</sup> India recognised all differences; she has all along tried to establish unity in diversity, to synthetise the different sects into co-operative efforts and to realise the "One" in "Many." The differences that existed outside were tolerated; they were not destroyed, but the inherent unity was maintained. This attitude of realising the One in "Many" naturally made her indifferent to political statecraft. This was bound to be, as it was the sense of conflict that generally goaded the State into action.<sup>2</sup> But in trying to avoid collisions India made the fatal mistake of abandoning the mutability of life by setting up boundaries of immovable walls.<sup>3</sup> It was "the negative benefit of peace and order but not the positive opportunity of expansion and movement." Naturally, life departed from her social system, and in its place she is "worshipping with all ceremony the magnificent cage of countless compartments that she has manufactured." It was a tragedy in history that India "treated life in all truth where it is manifold, but insulted it where it is ever moving." This lack of movement, encouraged to strengthen peaceful life, led to stagnation of the worst kind. Tagore was pained to find that "by squeezing human beings in the grip of an inelastic system and forcibly holding them fixed we have ignored the laws of life and death."<sup>4</sup>

It is true that there was a time when India was the meeting ground of various races. The Greek, the Persian,

<sup>1</sup> *Nationalism*.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's article on *Bhāratbarsher Itihāsh* (The History of India), *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Nationalism*.

<sup>4</sup> *Creative Unity*.

the Saka came out to India and mingled freely with the Indian races. It did not breed conflict ; rather a new India was created out of the mould into which different potters poured out their clay. The Indian civilisation thus became rich with variegated colours. But Tagore asked us to remember that all these virile and creative efforts had taken place before the Hindu age. The Hindu age was really one of reaction—at that age the edifice of Brahminism was based on a strong foundation.<sup>1</sup> It was made impenetrable by the building up of impassable walls of customs and traditions. It was perhaps forgotten that a living thing would become lifeless if it was choked up in all directions.

Many inquiring students of Indian history are amazed by the fact that the Aryan mind which was mobile and virile and was enlivened with the vision of wholeness of life sank down to listlessness and inactivity, concerned more with small details of life. Tagore sought to give a historical explanation of the overpowering tragedy by stating that India forced living souls into a permanent passivity, “making them incapable of moulding circumstance to their own intrinsic design, and of mastering their own destiny.” At a certain time after the Buddhist period in the history of India, Hindu society established a code of prohibitions and restrictions to preserve the distinctive characteristics of Hinduism and to rescue it from the embrace of foreign influence and contact.<sup>2</sup> These restrictions did not only taint merely Hindu-Moslem relations later on ; they affected one and all even in the Hindu clan. The spirit of exclusiveness that was generated was the real problem, and the remedy lay in the change of heart, in the alteration of the basic traditions of the Hindu age.<sup>3</sup> The handicaps that are within, the shackles that

<sup>1</sup> Translated from a letter written to Dr. Kalidas Nag in 1320 B.S. (1922). Published in *Kālāntar* (The Changing Age).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

retard free intercourse amongst men, the bondage that takes away the freedom from fear—these basic defects are to be changed by education, by training, and by self-control and discipline. Hindu-Moslem unity can be effectively brought about in a new age. Our mediaevalism still exists, it shall have to go. There is no other alternative ; we are to await the period of renaissance which will take us into the modern age, free from reactionary forces dwarfing the development of the Indian State and Society.

### RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

There are two religions, Christianity and Moham-medanism, which seek to obstruct the observances of other religious communities. The passport to union with them is to embrace their religion. There is one distinctive virtue of Christianity, that is this. It is the torch-bearer of the modern age ; the Christian mind is not covered with the morass of mediaevalism, it is not hide-bound in the religious system. That is why the Christian people have not obstructed association with others. Moreover, the European and the Christian are not synonymous terms ; they are known by their nationality and not by the religious label. With Moslems it is different ; they are essentially Moslems first. It may be noted, in this context, that the nationalist theory of the State which does not find support in the Quoran is accepted by the modern Moslem States. Turkey has decisively eschewed religion from the arena of politics. Indian Moslems, however, are definitely under the influence of the Islamic creed that the civil and the religious authority are intertwined. Mohammed was not only the teacher of a creed, but the founder of a State, and accordingly Moslem theocracy was enunciated in the Quoran. The Moslem State enjoined a religious obligation in which the bond of citizenship was the acceptance of Islamic faith ; Moslem theology teaches the doctrine of

religious war against infidels ; Moslem jurisprudence declares that the civil and religious law of Islam and the civil and religious status of Moslems are inseparably mixed up. In the circumstances, Hindu India was confronted with a serious problem. But by the time Moslems entered India, Hindu India had practically lost the comprehensive view of life. Thus the meeting was under the influence of bad stars. Moreover, Hindus are distinct from Moslems, because Hinduism carries on non-violent non-co-operation with all other religions. But Hinduism was a mobile force when it tried to accommodate all without ruining the distinguishing characteristics of others. The difficulty was that Hinduism very soon canalised its social activities into barren and immobile directions with the result that the Hindu of to-day deems his religion indissolubly connected with birth and customs. A Moslem can mix freely and on an equal plane with all others in the Islamic fold ; the Hindu is obstructed in the freedom of his movement even amongst the members of his community. A Moslem does not discard others, belonging to the different religious communities, in dealings and at dinners, but the Hindu is much too careful there. Social customs and traditions are the best agencies to bridge the gulf between man and man ; one can meet in unison with the other in social ceremonies and festivities. But the Hindu feels thwarted at every step, as he is not free to mix cordially with all in social observances and festivities ; he has a number of social restrictions to respect. The Hindu and the Moslem have met in Indian soil. In the case of Hindus the obstacles to union originate not from religion but from social customs ; with Moslems the real handicap arises from religion and not from social observances.

It is unfortunate that we have formed our society in a manner that keeps our Moslem brethren at a considerable distance. We have scorned them, we have inflicted injustice on them, and retribution has come to us in the form of injury by those whom we injured. The contribution of

Moslems towards India's culture is not negligible, but we have remained ungrateful. Tagore said :

" The Muhammadan has come to India from outside, laden with his own stores of knowledge and feeling and his wonderful religious democracy, bringing freshet after freshet to swell the current. In our music, our architecture, our picture art, our literature, the Muhammadans have made their permanent and precious contributions. Those who have studied the lives and writings of our mediaeval saints and all the great religious movements that sprang up in the time of Moslem rule, know how deep is our debt to this foreign current that has so intimately mingled with our life."

Thus our gratitude to Moslems should be considerable.<sup>1</sup> India's culture is now the product of Hindu culture and Moslem culture, intermingled in one current which is overflowing our national life. In the analysis of Hindu-Moslem relations Tagore's emphasis on the difference between religion and the religious system is to be taken note of. According to him, the one is fire and the other ash. " Religion prescribes : if you do not respect man, evil unto both of them who insults and who is insulted. But the religious system states : if you do not respect the detailed observances of mercilessly insulting man, you are guilty of apostacy. Religion says : he who unfairly treats a person

<sup>1</sup> Historians point out that the gifts of the Moslem age to India are visible in different directions :—

(1) Restoration of touch with the outer world which included the revival of our Indian Navy and sea-borne trade both of which had been lost since decline of Cholas.

(2) Internal peace over a large part of India, especially north of the Vindhyas.

(3) Uniformity secured by the imposition of the same type of administration.

(4) Uniformity of social manners and dress among the upper classes, irrespective of creed.

(5) Indo-Saracen art in which the mediaeval Hindu and Chinese schools were blended together. Also new style of architecture and the promotion of industries of a refined kind (e.g. shawl, inlaying, kinkhab, muslin, carpet, etc.).

(6) A common *lingua franca* called Hindusthani and an official prose style.

(7) Rise of our vernacular literature, as the fruit of peace and economic prosperity under the Emperor of Delhi.

(8) Monotheistic religious revival and Sufism.

(9), Historical literature.

(10) Improvements in the art of war and civilisation in general.

Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar.

damages his own inner self. But the religious system states : whatever be the sufferings, if parents permit their widowed daughters to drink water on certain specified dates, they help sinning. Religion says : vices within and without are cleansed by repentance and welfare efforts. But the religious system states : if you bathe in a particular river on the day of solar or lunar eclipse, your sins and the sins of your forefathers will be washed away. Religion says : your mind will expand if you cross the seas and study the countries outside. The religious system states : if you cross the seas you are to make penance for it. Religion says : he who is genuine deserves respect, whether he belongs to our own country or not ; the religious system states : the Brahmin, however unworthy he may be, is to be respected. In short, religion unfolds the key to salvation whereas the religious system invites the bondage of slavery.”<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted, in this context, what the Sanskrit word “dharma”, which is usually translated into English as religion, signifies. To quote the Poet, “dharma is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth, of all things. Dharma is the ultimate purpose that is working in our self. When any wrong is done we say that dharma is violated, meaning that the lie has been given to our true nature.”<sup>2</sup>

The religious system is overpowering the Hindus to a degree. Besides, the difference between Hindu and Moslem is not merely religious, the social structure is also different. There is unity in Moslem society as the religious teachings pervade it ; there is inequality in Hindu society through the influence of age-old injunctions. Moslem society is more consolidated than Hindu society. Those who are habituated to the rigid framework of sectarian creeds do not find anything wrong in inelastic society ; that is indeed tragic.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article, *Kartār Ichhāy Karma* (As the Master Pleaseth) in 1324 B.S. (1917).

<sup>2</sup> *Sādhana*, p. 74.

Tagore analysed the essential differences between a Hindu and a Moslem.<sup>1</sup> A Moslem is defined by his religion. His religion does not consist merely in its spiritual essence ; a great deal of it is formal, the outcome of special historical circumstances. A Hindu is known by his speciality, i.e., social conventions. Surrounded in his personal life by prohibitions of all kinds about the most insignificant details of his daily career, an orthodox Hindu lives insulated in the confinement of his conventional solitary cell. His is a world which has one gate of entrance, the gate of birth, though the gates of departure are innumerable. But a Moslem is dominated by the externals of religion which make it difficult to establish channels of intimate relationship with neighbours belonging to a different religion. Thus we must know that Hindus and Moslems can never have any real union, until we can cast off the shackles of our non-essentials and free our minds from the grip of unmeaning traditions. But "in our greed for immediate political result, we are apt to ascribe the fact of our tendency towards separation to accidental circumstances, refusing to see that a code of behaviour which has not the sanction of reason and yet has the support of religion, must result in the creation of irreconcilable divisions between men. In reason alone, can we have our common meeting ground."

Tagore did not believe in the efficacy of the doctrine

<sup>1</sup> Here is the statement of a true and eminent Mussalman scholar :—

"India is our own mother-country which gave us birth. We have made our homes here, married here, begotten children here, and here on this soil of India we have buried our sacred dead. India, therefore, must needs be dearer to us than any other country upon earth. We should love this very soil of India which is mingled with the dust of our ancestors. For a thousand years our own religion of Islam has been intimately bound up with India ; and in India, Islam has won some of the greatest triumphs for its now peculiar form of civilisation. We should love, therefore, the history and government of India which have been shaped by such great monarchs as Akbar the Great and his successors. I cannot bear to hear Indian Mussalmans speaking without reverence and affection for India. By all means, let us love our Mussalman brethren in other countries, but let us not have anything to do with the encouragement of those who tell us that we, Mussalmans, must always be looking outside India for our religious hopes and their fulfilment."

that Hindu-Moslem differences were to be composed merely for the sake of political statecraft. To him the mere political necessity is unimportant; it is for the sake of our humanity, for the full growth of our soul, that we should turn our mind towards the ideal of the spiritual unity of men. So Tagore laid special stress on the strength of Hindu-Moslem friendship and observed :

“Let us announce to the world that the light of the morning has come, not for entrenching ourselves behind barriers but for meeting in mutual understanding and trust on the common field of co-operation; never for nourishing a spirit of rejection but for that glad acceptance which constantly carries in itself the giving out of the best that we have.”

The vision of India at peace, growing in fullness of heart but not crippled by any differences, was the contribution of Tagore.<sup>1</sup> A nation infected by internal dissensions is like a building whose mortar has been changed to sand. It stands precariously; so we are to keep ourselves straight and erect first. In our weakness lies the strength of the British. Tagore did not seem to believe in the theory that we should be in a position to heal our differences, if we would get self-rule first. He believed that self-rule would never be a gift, and as such we could never wrest an inch of right, unless we would compose our differences. The virtues which are necessary in a fight with the alien ruler can never be cultivated if we allow our differences to grow in volume. Attainment of freedom is not a child's play—so it can never be had by mere patchwork. In a period of epidemic, there is no good discussing the abstract principles of sanitation. He did not support the idea of shirking the problem. He asked us to face it boldly and straightly, and we sensitive people are always shy at straight talks. Our politicians have been

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wells says: “Do not let differences of accent and idiom annoy you. Many great movements have been crippled, many great opportunities lost by the minor spites of the elect. Vindictive self-assertion is an invariable characteristic of the hopelessly damned. Watch yourself for the minutest first speck of this leprosy.”



trained in the game of bluff, as a result of which the most important problem remains unsolved. The Poet has incurred the wrath of those politicians who are ready to welcome everything except truth, because they trade on lies. Tagore told nothing but truth, when he discussed the "Way to Unity":

"The true way to maintain a harmonious unity is by according due respect to the true distinctness of the different parts. The artificial consolidation of the mangled in spirit, the crippled in life, the dependent and the hard-pressed can only remain a jumble of incongruent parts. At the period of the swadeshi movement in Bengal, we experienced a desire to make the Moslems one with ourselves but we did not succeed in doing so. Doubtless a coalition with them would have been very convenient for it to be feasible. If there are differences between Hindu and Moslem which are real, they cannot be spirited away by jugglery. If in our anxiety to secure some convenience, we ignore the facts, the facts will ignore our convenience. We failed because the invitation which we extended to the Moslem was for serving a purpose, not because it was inevitable, as is the invitation of mutual good feeling in common service. . . . Peace between the two sections of the population can only be had either through apathy and forgetfulness or through fear of foreign rule and common hatred against it. They may form an alliance for some such immediate object of mutual self-interest but these alliances like political alliances between countries are not only transitory but in constant danger of ending in violent reaction."

In the analysis of Hindu-Moslem riots, Tagore came to deeply suggestive conclusions. They have profound political significance. Some of them are stated below<sup>1</sup>:

1. In the West conflicts do take place, but there are two parties, the one party creating disturbance and the other party quelling it. There is no third party to look on and mock at them from outside. The rule by an outsider keeps up loose joints which show fractures at the slight pressure.

2. In India there is a rigid line of demarcation

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Tagore's *Choto-o-Baro* (The Great and the Small) written in 1924 B.S. (1917) and published in *Kalantar* (The Changing Age). Its English translation appears in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, May 1936.

between Hindus and Moslems. Religion is confused with texts and outward observances, and as such it is the greatest of all obstacles to peace. Religion should not continue to lay stress on external observances. We hurt universal religion by insulting men on the pretext of exclusive religion.

3. "If ever Hindus and Moslems can have a common ideal of national welfare, and that ideal can find concrete shape in some system of common government, then their external differences will become negligible compared with the unification arising out of common endeavour and fellow-feeling."

4. "We have no responsibility for our own self-defence, because our defence has been taken off our hands by an outside power. That is what is emasculating us, making us both weak and resourceless. If we had power and responsibility it would have been equally to the interests of Hindus and Moslems to maintain them intact; both parties would have taken good care not to allow license to go unchecked, and India would have made strong the foundation on which she stood."

5. "Under British rule, we have had unified Government but not unified responsibility,—that is why our union is from the outside. Such union does not bring us near, it merely keeps us side by side, so that the least shock knocks us against one another. It is like the proximity of men sleeping on the same floor, not of men awake and marching along the same road. There is nothing in it for us to glory or rejoice in. We may stoop low to give thanks for it, but cannot be uplifted by it."

6. The old society of village communities has decayed, and responsibilities of our countrymen have been shifted to Government. But we are in a peculiar stage of transition. Government do not discharge their responsibilities, nor is the village community in a position to enforce the performance of obligations. "The Brahmin still exacts his fees, but does not advance learning. The landlord extorts his rents, but does not make property of the tenants his concern.

The upper classes insist on being paid due respect by the lower, but do not look after their welfare. Our expenditure on social ceremonies is as heavy as ever, but the vast sums so spent do not circulate within the community." Social evils are there; Government responsibilities are evaded. Thus, our people do not feel the urge to serve the motherland.<sup>1</sup>

7. In free countries the bureaucracy leaves gaps through which the people of the country can grow and flourish. In a subject country like India the bureaucracy takes good care to leave no such gaps.

Religion must remain as a liberating agency and not a vast prison-house. When religion becomes a possessive institution in the hands of its priests, it becomes an active agent of schism and strife. The mechanical spirit of tradition is essentially materialistic. The mission of religion is the liberation of soul, but it is found to be instrumental in shackling the freedom of mind. Tagore did not advocate a common church for mankind, "a universal pattern to which every act of worship and aspiration must conform." Religion is expression. So he urged: "The self-expression of God is in the variedness of creation; and our attitude towards the Infinite must in its expression also have a variedness of individuality, ceaseless and unbending. When a religion develops the ambition of imposing its doctrine on all mankind, it degrades itself into a tyranny and becomes a form of imperialism. That is why we find a ruthless method of fascism in religious matters prevailing in most parts of the world, trampling flat the expansion of the spirit of man under its insensitive heels."<sup>2</sup> The reality of religion

<sup>1</sup> In our country religious observances are preserved by Brahmins, and being based on "Varna" the system leads to the inevitable neglect of individual responsibility. Institutional religion may have drawbacks, but it keeps alive individual responsibility, as Brahmins (or clergymen) should not exercise their rights arising from birth; they have to be responsible to society.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's Presidential Address at the Sri Ramkrishna Centenary Parliament of Religions, Calcutta, March 1937.

has its basis in the truth of Man's nature in its most intense and universal need, and "where it frustrates that need, and outrages its reason, it repudiates its own justification."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore had all along advised that "let us unite not in spite of our differences, but through them. Let all human races keep their own personalities, and yet come together, not in a uniformity that is dead, but in a unity that is living."<sup>2</sup> He believed with the Chinese savant, Laotze: "Those who have virtue attend to their obligations; those who have no virtue attend to their claims." We should cherish what has a permanent value. The strong have their rule in the human world, but Tagore refused to accept this as a revelation of truth.<sup>3</sup> Religion that insults, debases, binds and blinds, is no religion. Tagore in *Chandalika*, a two-Act drama, showed that self-consciousness which gave the dignity of one's own role and function was good, but it had an intoxicating influence, and as such it was found that intoxicated with vanity and pride, one who clings to his rights trespasses on those of others. Hence, Moslem consciousness, after years of suppression, is asserting, and it breaks out in the smothering of others' rights.

Regarding the solution of Hindu-Moslem conflict Tagore wrote in 1922:<sup>4</sup>

"The solution may come only with a change of heart or with the change of time. Europe emerged into the life of the modern age out of the darkness of medievalism only with the extension of her knowledge and with a devoted pursuit of truth. In the same way, our two communities, Hindus and Musalmans, have to break away from the limitations and march ahead. If the whole race is buried under the tomb of the burden of the past, there cannot be any progress, and human unity will remain an impossible dream. The barriers and inhibitions are inherent in our present mental make-up.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's address on the occasion of the opening of the Chinese Hall at Santiniketan, April 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> A letter addressed to Dr. Kalidas Nag.

These we must shake off before we can hope to attain freedom in any sphere of life. Such a radical change can come only with true education and spiritual discipline. We must discard such worn-out conventions as teach us to hug the cage and forget the wings. And then and then only we shall attain real well-being for all. Hindu-Moslem amity waits for the fullness of time."

In Tagore's opinion, "the unshackled Hindu mind has always proclaimed the freedom of joy as the true object of man's religious striving." Whenever any particular scripture, temple, philosophy or ritual has usurped the place of such grand freedom, it has done so contrary to the spirit of truth, and "necessarily therefore of true Hinduism." He found that "our heaped-up dead traditions had threatened to smother our consciousness of the Infinite, making petty our daily life, breaking up our communities into a hundred different sections, reducing our manhood to a narrow provincialism. We had ceased to be aware of the rule of the One, and were kept distracted by the tyranny of the many."<sup>1</sup> The timidity of our minds, the weakness of our efforts, the diffidence in our intercourse, the narrowness in our outlook, the crass ignorance in the various departments of our lives—all these have dragged us down to the depths of our doom and made the soil fertile for conflict and chaos. The first essential and basic thing is the freedom from the mechanical, from the dark, from the dead.<sup>2</sup> By inert slothfulness and unmeaning activities, we are lost to the sense of the greatest good. That is India's deepest tragedy. He did not favour the doling out of religious teaching through the academic machinery of education. There are religious truths which are of the nature of information, that can be added to our stock of knowledge. But religion, understood in its true sense, which is of the nature of inspiration, can hardly be communicated through teachings in the school. "It must come immediate from the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on Religious Education, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, November 1935.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

burning flame of spiritual life, in surroundings suitable for such life." Religion, according to Tagore, "establishes the right centre for life's activities, giving them an eternal meaning; maintains the true standard of value for the objects of our striving; inspires in us the spirit of renunciation which is the spirit of humanity."<sup>1</sup> The forest university of ancient India never harboured any creeds, nor built rigid walls round them of logical consistency. Religion, when it is free from the bondage of sect, contains the true spirit of liberation in its essence of spiritual truth, and Tagore believed in the freedom of spiritual realisation.

In this context, it may be stated that Tagore had great hesitation in appending his signature to the public Memorial to the Secretary of State for India protesting against the Communal Award incorporated in the Government of India Act 1935. The Award separated the Hindu from the Moslem through the introduction of separate electorates and through offering undue concessions to Moslems at the cost of Hindus in the matter of enjoyment of weightage in the legislature. Tagore put in his signature to the protest Memorial not with a view to widening the doors of governmental privileges for the Hindu. He felt that unjust and unequal division of political rights and privileges was bound to lead to the accentuation of communal disharmony.<sup>2</sup> Rulers will change, but Hindus and Moslems are to live together. If deep wounds are inflicted in the body politic of society causing segregation and exclusiveness, they are not likely to be healed up soon. The undue concessions shown unto Moslems will, in the ultimate analysis, work out erosions in Moslem society.<sup>3</sup> This is equally unfortunate for the Hindu, as in the march of history Hindus and Moslems are to travel as comrades without reference to the third Power, that is the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's letter to Dr. Amiya Chakravarty on the 20th May, 1939 (published in the *Prabasi*, a monthly in Bengali, in July 1939).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

British. Tagore kept his faith in the discovery of the inner dynamic principles of history determining the fulfilment of the historical destinies of man, peoples, and mankind, and the unfolding of the freedom of the human spirit. That was why he could not but record his protest against the Communal Award of 1932 which later helped the emergence of Mr. Jinnah's two-nation theory.

### THE BRITISH GAME

Many Hindus believe that the British Government do not aim at the resolving of the Hindu-Moslem conflict. They cannot possibly welcome the collaboration of Hindus and Moslems under the banner of a common organisation. So it is in their interests that they will keep alive the flame of religious animosity and humble Hindus through the instrumentality of Moslems. It is a conviction held by many that Hindus are dealt with strongly when communal frenzy breaks out and that Moslems are humoured and cajoled. The spread of such belief is not helpful for communal concord. Often it is found that Government create discord by curbing the legitimate rights of Hindus on the plea of apprehended communal riot; this serves as an encouragement to Moslems. It may be contended that the governmental policy of partiality for Moslems is born of the desire to avoid inflaming Moslems who are disciplined, organised and powerful. It helps matters when in Hindu-Moslem feud, the timid, disorganised Hindu community is punished to the exclusion of Moslems. The real reason is that the British do not like to see Hindus united and organised, and accordingly they encourage Moslems to undermine the political organisations of Hindus. Tagore, however, thought that the repression of Hindus by Government would bring Hindus together, and that it would not do any harm. "Those who have been defeated again and again but have never learnt to come together, those who harbour the

poison of disunity in their social organism, how can they be bound together? That the British are indifferent to the pangs of our hearts, that the English strike us and multiply the creation of wounds is imperceptibly bringing the Hindus together.”<sup>1</sup> He found that the British, guilty as they were, could not be relied on in the matter of solution of communal harmony. The urge must come from within; the blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms must be shaken off; the social customs and ideals which have generated a want of self-respect and a complete dependence on those above us must be removed. “It was my conviction that what India most needed was constructive work coming from within herself. In this work we must take all risks and go on doing the duties which by right are ours, though in the teeth of persecution, winning moral victory at every step, by failure and suffering.”<sup>2</sup> The real constructive work is to make ourselves strong, to evolve social unity within and to achieve the harmony of reconciliation with fellow beings living in the same land.

As President of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Pabna, Tagore made the following significant observations in 1314 B.S. (1908) :

“The sword of disunity is hanging over the country. Years have rolled by when the Hindu and the Moslem have enjoyed the same affection sitting on the lap of the common motherland, still to-day there are obstacles to their happy union. As long as the causes of this weakness subsist so long there is hardly any chance of effectuating in full any of the noble hopes of the country; the discharge of our political duties will be difficult at every step. We should not lose heart if this disunity between Hindus and Moslems is turned into a conflict by a third Power—we shall certainly be able to overcome the created disorder if we can banish the evil of disunity from our midst. This conflict is bound to die in course of time. Government would hardly be equal to fanning the flame for all time

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Subicharer Adhikar* (The Right to Justice) written in 1301 B.S. (1894).

<sup>2</sup> *Nationalism*.



to come. If they encourage this conflagration, time will soon come when they shall have to call fire-brigade to quell it in their own interests. If the houses of subjects are set in flame, some time or other through uncertain directions the fire is likely to spread up to the premises of the King's palace."

Tagore advised us not to lament, not to weaken ourselves by bemoaning before others, not to feel despondent by dashing our heads against bolted doors. In his view, there is no cause of despair if we return to our own men, our own kith and kin, and resist all attempts at separating one community from the other. In the past we were inert, so we could remain united ; our aim should be to remain knit together in the full blaze of action. We apprehend that our ruling race can sow dissensions amongst us ; it merely emphasises that there are rifts in our social structure. Those fissures shall have to be removed ; unity is to be strengthened. All this can be done by us and us alone. If we look to others, we shall be disappointed. So Tagore said :

" We shall remain firm where we have our own strength ; we shall remain alive to our duty ; we shall place reliance on those who are our own people. We shall not despair, nor shall we complain against the conduct of Government . . . We want no favours ; governmental hostility will increase our prowess. Do not lull us to sleep ; pleasures are not meant for us ; do not let the dose of opium of slavery increase day by day ; in your oppressive rule lies our deliverance. There is but one way to instil vigour into the lifeless—strife, insult and want, and not cordiality, not helpfulness and not contentment."<sup>1</sup>

It is an elementary truth, which should not be ignored, that the British will not spare us if we seek to harm them. Hence, when we agitate to wrest power or to undermine the foundations of British rule, we must be prepared for hard knocks from them. But often, very often, we forget this truth. In the height of our anti-British agitation we expected humane treatment from the British. Such fond

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Banga-bibhāg* (the Partition of Bengal) written in 1311 B.S. (1904).

expectation did not show our wisdom. When we seek to seize power from British hands, should not the British in their turn try to fan communal hatred to cloud the issues and to block the way to the transfer of power from British to Indian hands? There is a general complaint that the British are secretly setting up Moslems against Hindus to stabilise their rule. Should we remain unprepared for this? Why should we presuppose that the British will not exploit weaknesses in our society to their advantage?

The fact that Moslems can be set up against Hindus is much more painful than the British policy of divide and rule. When sins are there and relations are strained, it is only natural that our enemy should take advantage of such unhappy situation. It calls for careful attention to our weaknesses and not to the enemy who prospers on our divisions. There is something vitally wrong in Hindu-Moslem relations in our country; it is continuing for a very long time. There is no other alternative but to suffer the penalty for this long-subsisting sin, although we remain indifferent to it, occasionally broken by outbursts of communal frenzy. "It is to be admitted that there is conflict amongst Hindus and Moslems. We are not only different; we are hostile to each other. For ages we have lived together taking fruits from the same orchard, drinking water from the same river, enjoying the same light, speaking the same language, suffering the same distress—still we could not formulate a code of neighbourly conduct, the code which is sanctioned by the canons of right conduct. We have been harbouring for long a sin to the effect that we could not but remain aloof in spite of our living together."<sup>1</sup> In many places, Hindus and Moslems do not occupy the same seat; Hindus consider water polluted by the touch of Moslems; they hate Moslems as infidels. "The country where religion (or the sastric injunction)

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Byadhi O Pratikār* (Disease and Remedy) written in 1314 B.S. (1907).

prescribes the hatred of man, where people are doomed to perdition for the drinking of water from the hands of a neighbour, where one's caste is to be preserved by showing insult unto the other, people of that country are bound to court insults at the hands of others. They shall have to receive the scorns of infidels who are ridiculed as such. Those who are not used to consider man as man ; those who are concerned in limiting the exercise of mutual rights with great subtlety ; those who know to forsake their own people at the speck of a slight fall and not to accept others ; those who have conscientious objections to make a bow of civility to the ordinary man ; those who are ever watchful to avoid association with men in various ways, they are bound to be weak on the plane of humanity. Those who have isolated themselves, those who are overpowered by a spirit of exclusiveness rather than the spirit of oneness, they have no escape from the bondage of poverty, insult and slavery.”<sup>1</sup>

The British have been sitting like an octopus upon Indians, not by their inherent strength. Our sins are the sources of their strength ; British rule is merely a symptom of the disease. This Hindu-Moslem conflict is deepening because our weaknesses in society are remaining unattended to. The foreign ruler will not quit India at our mere wish or at the launching of an agitation by a disunited people ; even if he quits, the country shall have to be made our own by our own efforts. That is the price of freedom. The fact that it is all to our advantage to have Hindu-Moslem alliance is not enough for the purpose ; it shall have to be earned by the removal of all hindrances from within. We shall have to overcome our mutual exclusiveness. That basic condition is to be satisfied. But often we are impudent enough to advertise our strength where we do not possess any. The flaunting of one's strength may be becoming of those who are really powerful, but it smooths the path of bankruptcy for the impotent. Those who are

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

isolated are really weak. It is not to be taken as an extraordinary event if the vessel which is just strong enough to carry the weight of passengers shows cracks when the passengers continue jumping on it. In that case, the leaks are to be repaired. The spring of all evils in our country is that we stand disunited, separated. Hence we should bend all our energies to the converging of the "many" into "one."<sup>1</sup>

It is a futile attempt to build up a nation by damaging national cohesion. Tagore was one of those who believed that the method of obtaining the objective was much more important than the attainment of the objective aimed at, as we shall soon be defeated in our attempts if human conduct registers any deviation from truth, that is, religion. No great work can be done by making truce with evil forces; that is what both of our Epics have taught us. The welfare of the country is the welfare of humanity. And that cannot be achieved by nursing the spirit of exclusiveness which is poisoning Hindu-Moslem relations. If we want to approach man we shall have to serve him, to remove the gulf that widens each other; we shall have to make ourselves humble. It is not by the ding-dong method of enforced alliance that communal conflict can be subordinated.<sup>2</sup>

### THE REAL PROBLEM

Our real problem is to consolidate the scattered parts and to build up a great nation. This should be our overriding consideration. If British rule helps us in achieving this task, it should receive adequate appreciation. If it is a fact that the British have set Moslems against Hindus, they have in fact served our cause, as no great work is possible in scorn of the basic truth. The truth is that Hindus and Moslems have never met in the arena of happy

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Desh-Hita* (Welfare of the Country) written in 1315 B.S. (1908).

<sup>2</sup> Translated from an article on *Sadupay* written in 1315 B.S. (1908).

understanding—the one has excluded the other in daily intercourse and social relationship. The real blame need not be laid at the door of Britons. It is to be remembered that the attainment of unity for expediency or for strategic considerations is not the highest truth. India has for long fallen from the ideal of living touch with humanity. All our feelings, our welfare efforts are so much restricted that the relations between man and man do not extend over the wider field of understanding and knowing each other. “We are separated like scattered islands, we are not continuous, wide and united like one continent.” Every individual should feel the urge of holding communion with the other in all his activities. The wall that separates, the gulf that yawns, the customs that block this communion, the knowledge that retards respectful intercourse with the neighbour and the world without, the activity that mars the inter-dependence of man and man, the code that teaches exclusiveness in any sphere of life—all this is to go. Tagore keenly felt that in India our knowledge, activity, customs and intercourse with man—all stood broken up and divorced from cordial and respectful relations with neighbours. We have not respected one another, helped one another, understood one another. This scornful indifference, this communal approach, this mutual exclusiveness are definitely lowering ourselves, hampering our real work. These fundamental weaknesses can hardly go if the foreign ruler quits India ; these leakages can hardly be filled up by forging political union on strategic grounds. All this makes us weak, our knowledge defective, our society narrow. “Whoever lives in India, whoever has come to India, we shall be one by accommodating all—this will solve in India a great problem of the world. The problem is that man is different in colour, language, nature, behaviour, creed—humanity is great in this diversity ; in this temple of India we shall unify that diversity. Win the country by welfare efforts—overcome the suspicion of those who suspect you, defeat the jealousy of those who are

jealous of you. Strike at the bolted door again and again, do not go away in despondence, in sheer disdain. Human heart can never refuse human heart for all time to time.”<sup>1</sup>

Those who are protagonists of political unity amongst different sections and communities, obviously with a view to wresting power from the alien nation, contend that if in certain parts of Europe, particularly in Switzerland, different nationalities may live side by side in perfect amity and concord, why should not Indians, though split up into different sections and communities, be able to pull on under a common State. Tagore<sup>2</sup> was not evidently impressed with this kind of argument which was very popular amongst Indian nationalists. Switzerland is the home of different nationalities, but no spirit of exclusiveness poisons their mutual relations; they are one in religion, in customs and traditions; they can inter-dine and inter-marry. The best form of attachment arises from social cohesiveness; it cannot be cemented by mere words. Indians proclaim themselves as one great nation, but socio-religious injunctions stand in the way of social solidarity. They lie essentially scattered, spread out and un-co-ordinated. Even amongst Hindus there are wheels within wheels which discourage the feeling of oneness. So the one does not feel acutely for the other. We all know in our heart of hearts that our political unity suffers from national unreality. That is why we keep this unreality aside and want to broadcast our patriotic grandeur. Where the foundation is weak, it does not become stable merely on the superfluity of material. The patched-up unity during the Khilafat agitation in the twenties of the present century gave way to communal conflict later on, as the basic weaknesses were not removed. Tagore emphasised again and again that where religion had bred the spirit of

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Samasya* written in 1315 B.S. (*Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 10).

<sup>2</sup> The article on *Samasya* written in 1330 B.S. (1923), published in *Kālāntar* (*The Changing Age*).

exclusiveness, the door to unity was really bolted from within. Occasionally Hindus and Moslems have tried to meet to forge weapons against the ruling Power, but when the ruling Power remained aloof, the edifice of so-called unity immediately showed cracks. Even against the third Power, Hindu-Moslem unity had been achieved very clumsily. During the Bengal Partition agitation, Moslems did not identify themselves with Hindus. During the Khilafat agitation Moslems solicited the co-operation of Hindus in the matter of establishing the ascendancy of the Khalifa, and Hindus warmly grasped the hand of co-operation to make their non-co-operation movement effective against the British Power. The sources of inspiration were manifestly attuned to different keys. But when the storm passed away, Hindus and Moslems relapsed again into communal consciousness, and communal bickerings went on unabated. In fact, since the Sepoy Mutiny up to the present stage, communal concord had been a thing of the past.

It may be helpful at this stage to recite that historically Indian politics from 1858 onwards was brought directly under the aegis of Imperial diplomacy. After the Sepoy Mutiny Sir Syed Ahmed Khan appeared as the saviour of the Moslems bourgeoisie, and the movement initiated by him may be described as the Aligarh movement. The basic features of the Aligarh movement were as follows :

(1) The Aligarh movement was based on cheerful acceptance of British rule in India, and it tried to reverse the process of the Wahabi movement which was launched in the first half of the nineteenth century to re-found Moslem domination in British India.

(2) It was sustained by a spirit of competition with the Hindu in the matter of securing favours from the ruling race.

(3) The objectives of the Aligarh movement were to broadbase Anglo-Moslem friendship, to reconcile oriental

learning with Western literature and science and to make Moslems of India loyal subjects of the British Crown.

(4) The movement aimed at dissociating Moslems from Hindu organisations and from all kinds of anti-British agitation.

From 1858 right up to 1898 Syed Ahmed Khan was the pivot around whom Moslem politics moved, and it was this new philosophy of Moslems which heartened the ruling race to propound the theory of "counterpoise of natives against natives." It was true that the Moslem masses were influenced by the doctrines of the Wahabi movement, but by and by at the instance of the Moslem bourgeoisie Moslem masses forgot all about the basic postulates of the Wahabi movement and followed the leaders in their pursuit to carry favours from the "infidel" ruling race. The whole trick was done by the authoritative declaration from Moslem High Priests that India was not a *Dar-ul-Herb* but a *Dar-ul-Islam* as the peculiar observances of Islam prevailed therein. The *Jehad* against the British was very soon turned into a *Jehad* against Hindus. It opened up a wished-for vista before the Moslem upper classes. Since then, Moslems have been moving away from Hindus, and politically this exclusiveness was sanctioned by the ruling Power through the grant of separate electorates in 1909. Even the Khilafat movement which was a temporary reversal of the tactics of the Aligarh movement was essentially Islamic, as it encouraged the Islamic doctrine of religious war, extra-territorial patriotism and Moslem theocracy. Moslems in India have never been Indians in their approach to politics. Even to-day the Pakistan movement is nothing but a continuation of the Aligarh movement of Sir Syed Ahmed and the Pan-Islamic movement of Sir Muhammad Iqbal.

This historical background is offered to set the Hindu-Moslem conflict in its proper setting. But during the period from the battle of Plassey in 1757 to the Mutiny of 1857, Hindus for historical reasons won the race of gaining



favours from the foreign Ruler. They took to English education and gained Government posts and honours. Moslems were defeated in the race as they hesitated to accept English education and British rule in India. In this wise, a sort of difference grew up accentuating communal divisions. Tagore was of the opinion that this unfortunate difference would have to be obliterated in the interests of unity; it is standing in the way. So he urged Hindus to pray cheerfully for the extension of favours, in respect of Government posts, to Moslems. When the limit of such patronage will be reached, Moslems will find that drops of little favours are of no significance. When they will know that there is no real gain without prowess, without unity, and that it is sacrilegious to damage the unity of the common motherland, then and then only will the two brothers join hands in the meeting ground of common action.<sup>1</sup> Unity can only be achieved through the observance of necessary self-control, caution and patience. It undoubtedly involves sacrifices. In a modern State whose interference in the activities of citizens is increasing every day, Government post is not merely a vehicle of earning income; it is the passport to national service. Tagore advised us not to bicker with Moslems in the matter of allotment of services on communal lines; he preferred greater favours to Moslems so that they might attain parity with Hindus which would accelerate the pace of union. He may perhaps be criticised on the ground that when the State is taking upon itself all the responsibilities of social services to improve the standard of living, the grant of State services to a particular community, especially when that community is soaked with the poison of communalism, will make the whole governmental machinery inefficient and sectarian with prejudicial repercussions on the political and economic spheres. All this will

<sup>1</sup> The address of Tagore as President of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Pabna in 1914 B.S. (1908).

delay the day of deliverance. But Tagore tried to make it clear that suspicion was to be banished and that ultimately Moslems would have to accept the lesson of "earning rights by virtue of efficiency alone." The dawning of such good sense can be quickened in an atmosphere of trust, and that trust is to be earned.

Tagore laid emphasis on the two most essential things that India needed ; namely, education and unity. It makes one naturally anxious if education is damaged and unity marred. True education helps unity ; real unity is the highest form of training. In the absence of education and unity, Hindu-Moslem conflict is spreading. There can be no unity unless there is a change of heart ; the change of heart presupposes that the spirit of exclusiveness born of mutual hatred and distrust must go, and it can go if there is true education. In India the ways of living, the traditions of growing up within the communal cells, all this is definitely discouraging for true education and real unity.

### THE PARTITION OF INDIA

In describing the evil effects of the partition of Bengal, Tagore stated as follows :

" Moslems are in a majority on the eastern side of Bengal. The sense of unity is more powerful amongst Moslems than amongst Hindus for religious and social reasons—hence, the basic material of strength is ingrained among Moslems. This Moslem zone is bound up with Hindus on account of uniformity in language, literature and education. If Bengal is divided into two zones, the Moslem zone and the Hindu zone, then all the ties that bind Hindus and Moslems will be unloosened by and by. It is difficult to separate the Hindu from the Hindu by drawing a line in the map, because there is social cohesion amongst Bengali Hindus. But there is disunity amongst Hindus and Moslems. That disunity cannot be felt in all ugliness because of contiguous living ; both the parties were somehow united. But if the King proposes to widen the gulf that exists and make both the parties independent of each other, then in course of time Hindu-Moslem exclusiveness and the intensity of mutual jealousy will be undoubtedly on the increase. In fine, in this unfortunate country

it is not difficult to create disunity ; the basic problem is how to achieve unity.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus Tagore warned his countrymen against the division of the country into Hindu zones and Moslem zones. Although his warning was uttered in 1908, it is of special significance in the context of contemporary events when the Moslem League has been agitating for the creation of sovereign States in the Moslem-dominated areas in pursuance of the resolution adopted at its Lahore session in 1940. Tagore's opposition to such independent sovereign States was based on fundamental grounds ; he could not encourage the widening of the gulf, especially when mutual hostility, jealousy and disunity existed. It is contended by many that it may be graceful to accept the objective reality and not to insist on unity from sentimental considerations. With Tagore the position was otherwise ; he could not accept disunity as the last word on Hindu-Moslem relations. His basic apprehension was that the division of the country into different distinct zones would complete the phase of disruption ; it would make the blot on human relations indelible, a disaster to Indian civilisation.

That Tagore was not wrong could be found out from the analysis of the separatist tendencies inherent in the Pakistan plan advocated by the Moslem League. The Pakistan plan ignores the lesson that a State may in course of time produce a nationality ; it is likely to help a theocratic State ; it will, in the ultimate analysis, encourage the Islamic concept that non-Moslems can live only in a state of submission and dependence ; it may be embroiled in the Islamic tradition of extra-territorial allegiance. In this wise, the creation of separate States in the Moslem-dominated areas with a sovereign authority and without any integrating link with the Hindu zone, as given out in the Pakistan plan of Mr. Jinnah, will invite complications and administer a deep cut across the fundamental concept of Indian civilisation ;

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Sadupay* (Good Ways) written in 1315 B.S. (*Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 10).

harmony and co-operation between Hindus and Moslems will be jeopardised. It was Tagore's prophetic vision that he saw in the Bengal partition the seed of the creation of Hindu zones and Moslem zones, which he condemned unequivocally in the interests of lasting unity between the two communities. With him unity and inter-dependence are not questions of expediency ; they are fundamental to the solution of the problems of the individual, of the country and of the world.

Tagore, however, must not be misunderstood. He has always stood for the awakening of different sects, different communities. Every particular community has its own distinctive features, special characteristics which will enrich human civilisation. This consciousness of one's own culture and tradition helps one to rise to greatness ; he who is indifferent to his own distinctive culture is a mass of inert flesh. The realisation of diversity is not an antidote to real unity. Tagore was definitely of the view that one would feel the urge to become great when he was saturated with the pride of one's distinctive existence, and that real unity would come when both the parties were sufficiently awakened and enlightened.<sup>1</sup> It cannot lead to effective unity when either or both of the parties are sunk in a low state of existence. " When the two partners are unequally situated, the partnership subsists so long as it is necessary for them to overcome the common danger. But when that necessity expires, straightforward dealings are no longer resorted to at the time of the partition of property. Because of this suspicion Moslems have not responded to our call. It is true that if both of us remain united the net gain will be considerable, but with Moslems the vital point was if they would gain much more than Hindus.. Therefore, it was not improper for Moslems to say that it was ultimately to their good if they could rise to greatness separately. Sometime ago this spirit of exclusive independence was not

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Tagore's article on *Hindu Visva-Vidyalyaya* (Hindu University) written in 1918 B.S. (1911) (*Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 18).

present amongst Hindus and Moslems. . . . At present, Moslems are struggling their way to eminence in their own way. But this is the real road to perfect union, howsoever unpleasant it may appear to-day and whatever inconvenience it may cause us. It is difficult to give in charity unless you are rich ; man can really make sacrifices when he is great and noble. Jealousy and conflict are bound to appear so long as there is want and meanness. Self-effacement on the part of a weak person is not healthy ; self-abnegation on the part of a really great man is welcome.”<sup>1</sup> Tagore stood for the awakening of different races and creeds, because he believed that the ultimate realisation would come from the establishment of relationship with others. That was why every autonomous and independent nation was anxious to hold communion with the world outside and abdicate all features harmful to such union. Hindus and Moslems can meet on the plane of unity when both the partners are equally enlightened to sacrifice the small details and unmeaning rites that blur the vision of the wholeness of life. Tagore was a robust optimist all along. But he discarded the pandering to base sentiments which stood in the way of perfect harmony and co-operation. Every movement of upheaval should be judged by the test if it is helpful to unity in the broader field ; it should be treated as a part of the general problem, the problem being the achievement of unity and inter-dependence in the sphere of national and international activities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Stalin in his *Problems of Leninism* urged on the same thesis when he asked the proletariat to support every national movement, everywhere and always. It meant that “the support must be given to such national movements as tend to weaken, to overthrow Imperialism and not to strengthen or preserve it.” Tagore, therefore, pledged his support to the Moslem movement of upheaval, but he could not lend support to the division of the country into separate zones for the simple reason that it would menace unity for all time to come. The question of the rights of a community is not an isolated, self-sufficient question ; it must be considered from the point of view of the ultimate aim. Accordingly, the movement for Pakistan could not draw out support from Tagore, nor could it be supported by those who had faith in the vision of wholeness.

According to Tagore, the term "Hindu" in India has an extended connotation ; a Hindu is not to be known by the badge of sect or creed he carries. Islam denotes a particular religion, but the term Hindu signifies no particular creed. The concept of a Hindu in the history of India is co-eval with that of a nation in its social sense. Hinduism has passed through several ages ; it has crossed several stages also ; it bears the stamp of various thinkers ; its stream has flowed through the same geographical boundaries under the same sky ; it has witnessed various phases in history. A Hindu in India represents the culmination of these forces and stages ; no one in India, bound up with Indian society, shaped and influenced by Hindu thought, Hindu philosophy and Hindu traditions, can afford to be any other than a Hindu. Tagore developed his concept of a Hindu in his article on *Atma-Parichaya* (Self-Introduction) in 1319 B. S. (1912). A nation in its social sense can hardly be defined. Broadly it may be stated that if persons occupy a particular area and have lived for generations under the aegis of common historical forces, they fall under the category of a common nation in spite of apparent diversities in their social and religious observances. In short, Tagore accepted the modern theory that man was the product of his environment and that he could not be free from the influences of historical forces operating in society wherein he lived, moved and had his being. The nation is higher, greater than one's creed ; creed can be changed, but not so the nation. The solidarity of the nation is not affected by the emergence of a new religious community. Judged by Tagore's definition, Indian Christians, Indian Moslems, who have lived in India for generations, who have felt the impact of social and historical forces, are all "Hindus". One can change one's religion, but how could one change his nationality ? One cannot wipe out the past ; one cannot ignore one's environment and the social forces that contributed to his make-up. One may not be proud of all this ; one may soar above, far above his compatriots. All this

has nothing to affect, to prejudice his nationality. Tagore developed his contention more clearly when he stated :

“ A particular creed, a particular custom cannot be the permanent feature of any nation. Ordinarily all Englishmen are Christians, and their social customs are primarily based on that particular religion. But should any Englishman embrace Buddhism, he does not cease to be an Englishman. . . . From the standpoint of nationality, the same past, the same history have a greater binding force. That truth which has run through ages can hardly be changed.”

Particular Hindus may argue that their religion is fixed ; that those who embrace any other religion cease to be Hindus. But in fact, their Hindu heredity is not changed thereby. Tagore laid greater emphasis on this aspect of heredity. There is nothing permanent in Hinduism ; it has changed ; it has brought many creeds within its fold ; it has tolerated many radical deviations. All Hindus of India do not observe the same code. Historically, if a person is a Hindu, he remains a Hindu in spite of protestations from orthodox and conservative quarters. That was why Tagore vehemently protested against the suggestion that Brahmos were not Hindus ; he pointed out that Brahmos were members of a new religious community, but they were all members of Hindu society ; they could not have left their history, their environment, their past. “ The fruits of a tree can be removed from one packet to another, but they could not grow if they are changed from one branch to a different one.” Tagore, therefore, observed :

“ He who leaves his own people cannot afford to make others his own ; he who ignores his own home loses his right to invite the world to receive his hospitality. It cannot be true that a person can have a room in the large space of humanity if he casts off his own dwelling. . . . I can really save myself if I try to save the one who is mine—if I leave him aside, isolated, he will ultimately drag me down. Hence, in scorn of all hurdles, all discomforts, I am to find out my realisation, to fulfil my dream in my own environment.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Tagore's article on *Atma-Parichay* written in 1919 B.S. (1912) (*Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 18).

## CHAPTER VI

### BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

Our politics, the politics of a subject nation, has neither grammar, nor syntax; it is full of oxymorons. This is hardly surprising. Even a mild conflict with the foreign Administration produces a wave of infatuation and excitement throughout the country which makes correct diagnosis of the situation improbable, if not impossible. We do not know where we are and what to do. Pretension, not action, is often the ruling mood; idle criticism, not constructive work, is generally the sheet-anchor of the nation. Our leaders are often, very often, found to appreciate excitement more than the work. They give infatuation a higher place. They think if they can abuse the British Government in the most violent language, in a language which carries foam—not conviction, their services for the country end. Their duty is ordinarily to generate heat, and people heated thereby welcome them as prophets of nationalism. There is a belief already current in the country that Tagore, poet as he was, was a very docile citizen, and he dared not criticise British rule, oppressive as it is. Moreover, people go further and say that Tagore, if he had politics at all, preached the politics of subservience, and that he had always allied himself with the iniquities of the British administration in India. It has been his peculiar misfortune to be thoroughly misunderstood by his countrymen.

Tagore was the most uncompromising critic of British rule in India. He was more extreme than many extremist leaders, more penetrating than many unimaginative critics, and more critical than many other reputed Indians. Of all leaders, he had perhaps been the most successful in spotting out the worst defects of British rule, and he had exposed them relentlessly and mercilessly. His criticisms carry conviction, carry strength and move all.



## THE FIRST REACTION

The century from the Battle of Plassey in 1757 to the Indian Mutiny in 1857 saw the increasing influence of the East India Company and the withering away of Moslem hegemony. The process was gradual but effective. The Moslem *bourgeoisie* suffered most during the period. During Moslem rule the Moslem aristocracy monopolised nearly all the advantages. The legitimate sources of income to Moslem noblemen were the military command, the collection of revenue, and judicial or political employment. Besides these there were court services and “a hundred nameless avenues to fortune” thrown open to members of the ruling race. Moslems, therefore, did not take kindly to the establishment of British rule under the camouflage of the Company’s administration in India. The Company knew this, and it was their settled policy to shed the Moslem of the privileges of the conquering and ruling race. They took care to see that real power was transferred slowly from Moslem hands to the clutches of Britons. The Company took the following steps to make the Moslem *bourgeoisie* lie low before the British :

1. The Company shut the Moslem aristocracy out of the army, as their exclusion was necessary for the safety of British rule.

2. They deprived Moslems of the monopoly of lucrative functions in the administration ; Moslem law officers were abolished ; the police and the courts of law went out of Moslem hands.

3. Resumption proceedings struck at the Moslem foundations which maintained the educational system of Moslems.

4. The declaration of the Charter Act of 1833 that no native of India should by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent or any of them be disabled from holding any place, office or employment under the Company did not work in favour of Moslems.

5. By the Resolution of March 7, 1835, English became the official language of British India, and preferment in services which depended upon knowledge of English dealt a death-blow to the Moslem aristocracy. Moreover, there was the religious ordinance which made Moslem children spend some years in learning the Quoran.

It was also difficult for Moslems to forget that the East India Company obtained their footing in Bengal "as the servants of a Mahammadan Empire", and Moslem creed demands an absolute, a living, and even an intolerant belief. In the circumstances, Moslems could not and did not accept British rule as an inevitable fact in history, and unlike Hindus whose eclectic minds, synthetic attitude and experimental habits made them accommodating to new environments, Moslems held aloof in disdain and sank into a people with great traditions but without a career. The Indian Wahabi movement was the result of this reaction, and it was the first serious attempt by Moslems at the extermination of infidel British rule in India. The Indian Wahabis, under the inspiration of Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bareli, laid the greatest emphasis on the doctrine of religious war. Their teachings, discussed in detail in Dr. W. W. Hunter's *The Indian Mussalmans*, ran on the following lines :

(a) Holy war is a work of great profit. All material blessings are granted when the dignity of Moslem religion is upheld, and Moslem kings possessing powerful armies become exalted and promulgate and enforce Moslem law in all countries.

(b) War against the infidel is incumbent on all Moslems.

(c) Join the divine leader and smite the infidel.

(d) He who gives and joins in the fight shall receive seven thousand-fold from God; he who shall equip a warrior in the cause of God shall obtain a martyr's reward.

(e) The Indian Moslem who would save himself from

hell has the single alternative of war against the infidel or flight.

(f) Those who would deter others from holy war or flight are hypocrites.

(g) In a country where the ruling religion is other than Mohammedanism, the religious precepts of Muhammad cannot be enforced.

An inflammatory literature, propaganda from the central organisation, missionaries wandering through rural areas and traitor settlements—these formed the weapons of the Indian Wahabis in stirring up the revolt against British rule. They appealed to the masses; they asserted complete equality among themselves; they owed their strength to the support of the masses and the patronage of rich Moslems. Moslems who had drunk deep in the Wahabi doctrine of religious war found in the Sepoy Mutiny an open invitation to take revenge on the British. The Wahabis were active before, during, and after the Mutiny, and their sympathies with the Mutiny were so pronounced that the Mutiny was interpreted by many Britons as the last bid for the refounding of Moslem hegemony. The guilt of the Mutiny was fastened on Moslems, and the Wahabi movement and the Mutiny were suppressed with a strong hand. Moslems thus found themselves without influence, power and patronage; they were easily outstripped by those who had acquiesced in British rule and taken advantage of the British system of culture and education.

India comprises British India and Indian India. British India is not technically a Colony or a Dominion in the British sense of the term; it is a British territory within His Majesty's dominions. The Native States of India are British Protectorates. Protectorates are not parts of the British Empire as they are legally foreign countries. The foreign relations of Protectorates are controlled by the Protecting State. Inhabitants of Protectorates are not British subjects; the Crown legislates for Protectorates by Order-in-Council under the Foreign Jurisdiction Act 1890.

As legal terms, "nationality" and "citizenship" are synonymous; they refer to the legal status of the subjects or citizens of the State and to the relations between the citizen and the State. Nationality is the quality of being the citizen of a certain State. Nationality entitles him to certain privileges at home and to the protection of the State when he is abroad. A citizen may possess dual nationality; he may lose his nationality without acquiring another national status; and in that case he will become a "Stateless" person.

The status of a British subject imposes upon every citizen the duty of allegiance to the Crown. At the Imperial Conference of 1911 it was recognised that nationality was a matter of concern to all parts of the Empire. This led to the passing of the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914 in the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It was amended in 1918, 1922 and 1923. It defines natural-born British subjects, and deals with naturalisation, the nationality of married women, the loss of nationality and the status of aliens. The following are the natural-born British subjects: (a) a person born within His Majesty's dominions and allegiance; (b) a person born on board a British ship; (c) certain persons born outside His Majesty's dominions (if his father is a British subject at the time of the person's birth).

The Act of 1914 empowers the Secretary of State to grant a certificate of naturalisation to an alien who has resided in His Majesty's dominions for a period of not less than five years or been in the service of the Crown for not less than five years within the last eight years before his application. The object being the creation of a common status of a naturalised British subject throughout the Empire, powers analogous to those of the Secretary of State were given to the Governments of all British possessions, with the proviso that, except in the case of the self-governing Dominions and India, the exercise of those powers should be subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

The Dominions are of course to adopt the naturalisation part of the United Kingdom and may also rescind the adoption. They are free to determine the status of their own citizens and to discriminate against non-nationals, and thus the common status of a British subject is not co-extensive with specified minimal rights and privileges in all parts of the British Empire.

We in British India are British subjects. Indians are helots abroad, although they are British subjects, because Indian subjects can be discriminated against in several Colonies and Dominions of the Empire ; they are also helots at home because the Indian legislature is incompetent to safeguard the interests of her nationals as against the interests of Britons on the plea that they are British subjects. Section 111 of the Government of India Act 1935 forbids discrimination against a British subject domiciled in the United Kingdom. In explaining the Section in the House of Commons, the Attorney-General said : " The intention of the Section is that the British subject, by virtue of his being a British subject, shall not be exposed to any discrimination. You get that freedom from discrimination in respect of his being a British subject by referring to all those matters which are characteristics of or connected with his status as a British subject ". The discrimination against which Section 111 aims is in respect of the following matters: (1) right to entry into India, (2) travel and residence in India, (3) acquisition, holding or disposal of property, (4) holding of public offices, (5) occupation, trade, business or profession. In the event of the United Kingdom imposing any restriction on these matters, the Indian legislature may retaliate. There is nothing to indicate that the special responsibility of the Governor-General or the Governor to maintain balance in executive action would lapse on any executive discrimination in the United Kingdom against Indian nationals. The Government of India Act carries out the principle of partnership between Britain and India ; this is, in fact, the equality between a giant and a dwarf, and

these reciprocal provisions are inserted to perpetuate the dominance of Britons in the political and economic sphere, particularly in the field of economic exploitation of India. Apart from Section 111, Section 112 imposes restriction on discriminatory taxation of the British subject domiciled in the United Kingdom and Burma and of companies incorporated in the United Kingdom and Burma. The restriction applies whether the British subject is resident in British India or is resident anywhere in the world. Section 113 enables British companies to carry on business in India on the same footing as Indian companies; Section 114 grants this privilege to companies formed by British subjects domiciled in the United Kingdom but incorporated in India. In this wise, it is found that the legal competence of the Indian legislature to discriminate against British subjects domiciled in the United Kingdom or against British companies is taken away with the result that the economic exploitation of India by the United Kingdom may go on undeterred. Discrimination is, however, possible against the Dominion subjects.

Thus the concept of a British subject is giving Indians no specific privileges in different parts of the Empire, whereas it is handicapping India's economic development at home because of the predominance of British companies in Indian industrial structure. The legal position is this that the Government of India is a subordinate agency of the British Government and that the predominance of British companies trading in India cannot be prejudiced in any way.

#### BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

It is to be frankly acknowledged that the Moslem invasion of India did not create any profound impression. Moslems were also of the unchanging East, "with lives not lived in the present time, but hide-bound within the narrow limits of their history." They consolidated their Empire in India by dint of their physical prowess, but their mind had

no creative exuberance. "When they settled within our borders, they came into friction with us, but a friction that was external—a conflict of one set of inflexible habits and customs, one set of fixed beliefs, with a different set. Their influence affected the system of administration, but did not penetrate the region of the mind"<sup>1</sup> It was found that Persian was adopted as the Court language ; Persian manners were the marks of cultured society ; Persian words found their way into Bengali. But Moslems entered the country without letting in any light from outside ; they kept all doors closed to external influences. "The clash of their arms left its mark on the land, but did not rouse its people into any great creative activity in any new field. In time, these two civilisations, Hindu and Islamic, here stood side by side, with averted faces, each hemmed in by its own age-old traditions. Not that they had no influence whatsoever on each other,—the influence of Persian art on Hindu technique and of Islamic thought on Hindu sectarianism was both considerable and happy, but the two cultures so much contradicted each other that no new and vital ways of thinking on a national scale were released. Even today we think of the Mussalmans mainly in terms of number. They have brought into our politics problems of addition and subtraction; their presence does not multiply our forces, but divides them ; so that for India such increase of population has so far proved the reverse of fortunate."<sup>2</sup>

The British conquest of India was significant because they came in with the new ideals of Europe. Ideals occupy the mind. The British affected us widely and deeply. The moving force of European civilisation entered and stirred up our inert minds, "as the rain from the distant sky penetrates the earth and makes it shoot forth into exuberant life." The British, in fact, captured Indian minds by the sincerity of

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Kalantar* (The Changing Age) written in 1340 B.S. (1933). Its English translation appears in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, August 1935.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* In India of approximately 100 million Moslems the majority are converts from the Hindus.

their pursuit of truth and the purity of their strenuous exercise of reason.

Tagore, however, found out the distinction between the great Englishman and the small Englishman. We can catch glimpses of the great Englishman in the sky of English literature, but the small Englishman, bound hand and foot, tied to routine duties and amusements, touches the millions of India with the tip of his punishing or measuring rod. "The small Englishman has become worldly-wise, by prolonged absorption in routine, and like every worldly-wise man, he has come to look on callousness as strength of mind. He has come to think that the going on of his office like clockwork is the most important event in the universe. He has a supreme contempt for the man outside, even though, for all his apparent inconsequence, he has his place appointed by the God of the universe in His grand procession through the dust of the open road. Accustomed as the Englishman in India is to deal with the powerless people, he has come to the fixed conclusion, that as he is the ruler of the present, so is he the controller of the future. He does not stop at saying, "I am here," but proudly adds, "And here I shall remain."

Unlike the Moslem, the Englishman remained aloof; he did not adopt India as his own country, but he came near to our heart through his art and literature. The mobile power of European mind struck against the immobile Indian mind. It brought about a renaissance in the mind of India. The universal aspect of knowledge, the distribution of justice irrespective of castes and classes, the acceptance of an active and inquiring mind—all these were the revolutionary doctrines which British rule brought forth in seeking to cement the connection between India and the West. The influence of European mind, alert and watchful, overpowered the Indian mind, paralysed by the opium of Sastras and traditions. This was the reason why British

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on *Choto-o-Baro* (The Great and the Small).



rule in India was more powerful than Mogul rule. In the Victorian era which is ridiculed in the present age, England was in its top and best form. So its rule was not so irksome, but by degrees England degenerated and spread poison in the administration of India. Tagore accepted cheerfully the contact of the East and the West, and found in the new dispensation possibilities of much good. He felt an invigorating tone in coming into touch with Western literature. He went further and said: "When we first became acquainted with English literature, we gained from it not only a new wealth of emotion, but also the desire to free man from the oppression of man. In our ears sounded the proclamation breaking the chains of human slavery. To our vision was represented a valiant struggle to prevent human labour from being treated as a mere economic commodity."<sup>1</sup> This contact with the West has given us new lessons, new politics, new ideas. It has exploded the doctrine that man's rights have any relation to accidental birth in a particular stratum of society, that knowledge is not open to all, that social practices not founded on reason and on acceptance of human dignity have any merit.

The contact with the West awakened Japan. It was expected that the other Asiatic races would arise and awake. Many of us fondly hoped that the history of India would merge in the history of the world, that our political chariot would move onwards, and that the British would help us in our forward march. But suddenly the wheel sank down. The welfare of the country was subordinated to the maintenance of law and order. Tagore was disillusioned when he found India "smothered under the dead weight of British administration." In a significant message on completing his eighty years he spoke pathetically about the failure of British rule in India:

"As I emerged into the stark light of bare facts, the sight of the dire poverty of the Indian masses rent my heart. Rudely shaken out of my dreams I began to realise that perhaps in no other modern

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

State was there such hopeless dearth of the most elementary needs of existence. And yet it was this country whose resources had fed for so long the wealth and magnificence of the British people. While I was lost in the contemplation of the great world of civilisation, I could never have remotely imagined that the great ideals of humanity would end in such ruthless travesty. But to-day a glaring example of it stares me in the face in the utter and contemptuous indifference of a so-called civilised race to the well-being of crores of Indian people. . . . In India the misfortune of being governed by a foreign race is daily brought home to us not only in the callous neglect of such minimum necessities of life as adequate provision for food, clothing, educational and medical provision for the people, but in an even unhappier form in the way the people have been divided among themselves. The pity of it is that the blame is laid at the door of our own society. So frightful a culmination of the history of our people would never have been possible, but for the encouragement it has received from secret influences emanating from high places."

The large-hearted liberalism of the nineteenth century English politics of which Tagore was a great admirer deserted British rule in India. The liberality in the character of the English fascinated many of our nineteenth century politicians, and it made a deep impression on Tagore's mind. But the character of British rule disillusioned him, and he was merciless in the analysis of the exploitation of British rule in India, although he was enamoured of the spirit of sacrifice in the West. Those who formed their ideas with regard to the English through their mighty literature and living culture found only one side of the English race; they were merciless, relentless in their rule over dependencies. Tagore was alive to both aspects of the contact of India with England, and hence we find in him the contradiction of robust faith in the Englishman and ignoble contempt for the impersonal and unproductive rule of the British.

In the past we knew Moguls and Pathans who invaded India, but we had known them as human races, as invaders, but not as a nation. We loved and hated them as occasions arose. But with the advent of British rule, "we had to deal, not with kings, not with human races, but with a

nation—we, who are no nation ourselves.” Here, the nation was taken in the sense of professional organisation of the commerce and politics of the country, in the sense of mere abstraction. This abstract being, the Nation, is ruling India. In this reign of the Nation which is the organised self-interest of a whole people, the governed is pursued by suspicions. The governors do not know our language, they do not come into personal touch with us except as officials; they hinder our aspirations from a disdainful distance; they regulate all intercourse with the manipulation of office red-tape. They are indifferent to what happens to India, they are alive to their gains. But “we, who are governed, are not a mere abstraction.” Indians are individuals with living sensibilities. The British rulers thus do not touch the chord of humanity in India, they are threatening us with a perpetual helplessness of emasculation. This impersonal rule, the obscuring of the human side under the shadow of soulless organisation, all this is suffocating and cruel, and the very root of our life is being shaken. Tagore had great respect for the British race as human beings, but the rule of the British nation is “a cruel epidemic of evil that is sweeping over the human world of the present age, and eating into its moral vitality.” “The government by the Nation is therefore neither British nor anything else; and it is an applied science. It is like a hydraulic press, whose pressure is impersonal, on that account completely effective.”<sup>1</sup>

During the personal government of the former days when India had known foreign rule, there had been instances of tyranny, injustice and extortion. But in those days the governing race and the governed people could come into closer touch with one another and cultivate a communion of aspiration. The British nation merely administers, exercises law and order, and “its dire vigilance, being the vigilance of a machine, has not the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Nationalism*.

human to overlook or to discriminate.” Tagore complained that “mere administration is unproductive, it is not creative, not being a living thing. It is a steam-roller, formidable in its weight and power, having its uses, but it does not help the soil to become fertile.” But our former Governments, although lacking in many of the advantages of the modern Government, were not Governments by the Nation ; “their texture was loosely woven, leaving big gaps through which our own life sent its threads and imposed its designs.” But now “every single individual in the country of the No-Nation is completely in the grip of a whole nation.”<sup>1</sup>

Tagore quoted and agreed with Matthew Arnold that the Englishman employed simply material interests for his work of fusion with the other races, and as such there was no “vital union” between him and the people subjugated and ruled by him. “There is nothing like love and admiration for bringing people to a likeness with what they love and admire”—said Matthew Arnold. Tagore chastised the Englishman for his insular habits, for his conceit and indifference to others, for his exclusiveness. He does not like to understand other peoples with the aid of sympathy. The Englishman judges the whole world by his own standard. The spirit of accommodation is eloquently absent in him. Thus, there is a wall of misunderstanding between the Englishman and the Indian. The Englishman will never subordinate himself with a view to capturing the minds of others. He defends himself by proclaiming that the anti-British agitation in India has no concern with people ; it is got up by a few discontented politicians. This is definitely the fault of the Englishman. He carries on commerce with people from a distance. It is well known that failure is bound to follow efforts which do not touch human mind. Man is not a machine ; he is to be touched, understood by love and sympathy. The English-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

man does not like to approach the subject race through the door of understanding. He is powerful ; he is ready to do good, but he will not come close to human mind. "The Englishman does not extend mercy, he may benefit others ; he does not love, although he may protect others ; he does not respect others but he seeks to do justice. He does not sprinkle water in the soil, but shows no miserliness in sowing seeds. But if the corn of gratefulness does not grow in abundance, is it merely the fault of the soil ? Is it not a universal rule that human heart does not bear fruit unless it is approached through sympathy and understanding."<sup>1</sup> Tagore put the case in his own way :<sup>2</sup> "In a word, the Englishman has made himself useful, but not dear, to us. He gives us medicine but does not make it tasteful, but at last when we feel vomiting tendency, he speaks out fiercely and with anger," In this way, the anti-British movement arises principally from the wounds of lacerated hearts. Both the parties emit fire which could be extinguished by mutual softness and sympathy. A little amount of tact saves many unpleasant situations. But the Englishman does not seek to improve the situation by such tactfulness.

There are obvious difficulties in the way of the union of the English ruler and the Indian subject. There is the colour prejudice ; there are differences in dresses, habits and practices ; there is Anglo-Indian society which has competing and conflicting interests ; there is the absence of sympathy for our culture. Moreover, as ill luck would have it, we are weaker than Englishmen ; we cannot remedy the wrongs done unto us by them. In this world one is not entitled to his dignity if he is weak. Hence, we lose respect from all Englishmen. We are truly cowards ; we cannot demand human respect. Because of our inherent weakness we

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on "The Englishman and the Indian," written in 1900 B.S. (*Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 10).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

speaking out in anger, we blame others and bemoan our fate, but we shall have to accept insults from Englishmen who are powerful. The Englishman has understood that there is hardly any chance of revolt from the Indian. Those who could revolt are respected ; Indians have grown weak and imbecile.

Tagore in pointing out the characteristics of British rule in India referred to its impersonal character and observed : " Indian society showed that there was union of heart between the ruler and the ruled, this cannot be brought about by conquests, by mere administration. English poets have sung of the sufferings of Greece, Italy, Hungary and Poland, but how many of them have referred to our misery ? England looks upon India as her milch cow --this relationship of selfish interest brings out all the evils."

Tagore made a fascinating analysis of British rule in India in his book, *Raja-Praja* (The Ruler and the Ruled). In the course of analysis he observed :

" On a consideration of all factors it is found that the best way of checking the growing feeling of enmity between the ruler and the ruled is to devote our attention to the discharge of our immediate responsibilities by keeping aloof from the English. We cannot achieve happiness of heart merely by begging. We think that there will be an end of our sufferings if we can obtain rights from the ruling race. But when rights will be attained by way of begging, we shall find that the canker of indignity does not leave our hearts. We can have no peace unless we are in a position to fill up the emptiness of heart. Our real poverty will be removed when we can free ourselves from the bondage of smallness and meanness. Then and then only shall we be able to approach the King with dignity, with vigour."

It was Tagore's favourite thesis that we must earn our rights ; we get what we deserve. This being his basic philosophy, Tagore was more conscious of our own imperfections than those of the ruling race.

Before the introduction of British rule in India, India was under the rule of an individual Emperor ; at present India is being ruled by a nation for the sake of a nation. When the Emperor was on the throne of India, he knew that

the whole of India was his. Now Britons know that India belongs to the English nation as a whole. There were oppressions of the Emperor ; but at present we are bearing the burden of a nation. One can satisfy one God, but not the thirty-three Gods and Goddesses. The most tragic event is that India is being exploited for the satisfaction of the needs of a different nation. If the British King were our ruler, we could have satisfied him. But how can we satisfy a nation ? Every Englishman knows India to be his kingdom.

British rule is a soulless machine—only busy with enforcing Law and Order, Power and Discipline. It distributes no love, it is ready to squeeze one's heart, but it must have its system kept in tact in scorn of public opinion. Tagore said :

“ Our King demands loyalty and devotion from us. But devotion belongs to heart and that presupposes reciprocity. That means you are to come to me, love me, and that is not a question of force.”

The following incisive study of British rule in India is translated from Tagore's *Jatri* (The Traveller). Tagore observed with devastating candour :

“ The English, of all other European nations, have failed to understand India most miserably. There is an eternal mystery in India which could not be grasped by them. The particular aspect of India which could be ruled by the army was taken to be the whole of India, and the English were content with that. They have no feelings of amazement about India; but they have adequate contempt for her. The English, unlike the French and the German, have discussed so little about India outside political matters. Dailies, weeklies and monthlies of England do not convince us that India is revealed to England except through the spectacle of a politician. The chief reason is this that England needs India greatly. Necessity does not help England to obtain a true vision of India. Hence, the vision is obtruded, and as such it is not true. Necessity establishes relations through the gate of receiving only ; there is greed, but no joy, in such union. True relationship is based on the reciprocity of “ get and give ”. That is why England is not charitable towards India. I make no complaint of it ; it is but natural. The India which the English have got through greed is lost to the soul of England. This is the reason why India is a gain to England, a pride to England, and a trouble to England.

This is why England finds it difficult to provide health, to impart education and to offer political liberty to India, but it is far easier to inflict punishment. The English capitalist refuses to spend a single farthing for the welfare of India, although he sucks India dry and earns 400 to 500 p.c. profit in the jute market of Bengal; he is not a whit moved when India is in the grip of grave epidemics and endemics. But when the Authorities, red with anger, pass repressive laws and rule the famished, broken and ignorant people of the country with the strong baton of the police, the same English capitalist, swollen with profits earned in our country, cry bravado from the cushioned chair, and speak out, "this is indeed true administration." This is perfectly natural. Because, the capitalist has failed to see the country exploited as it is definitely screened by the wall of fat dividends. It is only through the road of love that man can reach the hearts where hunger and thirst play havoc, the minds wherein sorrows and happiness dwell. There the claims of the soul are higher than those of the self. He has neither the time nor the attitude to think on those lines. Hence, profit-earners are delighted when control in India becomes stricter. The maintenance of law and order is the work of the gate-keeper; the nursing of sympathy and respect belongs to human code.

I have no mind to be unfair. Law and order are essential for carrying on the King's administration. When there is chaos in the realm, it is not to be blamed if ordinary penal laws are superseded by emergent, lawless laws. It is to be recognised as natural if the disruptive movement of one party is crushed by the harshness of the other, however uncomplimentary it may be. In fine, if any political system is to be judged, the whole organisation of the State should be brought under review. If we find that there is the jostling of the crowd of gate-keepers in all departments of the country, but when people are thirsty and attacked by malaria, there is no response from any quarter,—if we find that there is magnificent catholicity in the expenditure for the embroidered dresses of darwans, that the grievances of all administrative departments, from the executive to the judiciary, are attended to, and that the demands of all of them are met, but when people are about to die of wants, they get nothing but advice on self-reliance (that is, when people are suffocated with the rope round the neck, they are advised to remember the name of Goddess Durga)—this lack of proportion makes us think of the darwans as messengers of destruction. In plain language, the house where the influence of unsympathetic darwans is much more than that of friendly and sympathetic relations is a prison. Do we not know that man surrounds willingly the garden with thorny hedges? But the gardener cannot take us to be unwise if we have



no enthusiasm for a garden where thorny hedges are much more cared for than the flower-trees, even when they wither away. The Ruler asks, "do you not want law and order in the country?" Our complaint is not against the police; our charge is against the lack of proportion. We complain, not that fire burns, but that cooking is postponed, although the expenses of fire are to be borne by us. The expenses of the fuel to be used in the oven are so overpowering that nothing is left to provide for rice and pulses in the cooking pot. If out of sheer hunger, tears roll down in our eyes, and our Authorities ask us in anger: "Shall we not light fire in the oven?" We reply humbly: "Light you must, but that seems to be the fire of the pyre."

"What I am complaining of has spread far and wide all over the world. The eternal truth of man is smudged by the thick brush of profit. That is why we find that it is easy to be harsh to man, to deceive man. Hence, politics is occupying the foremost position in the West. In other words, the shrunken hearts of mankind are being pressed under the weight of the swollen pockets of the rich. Never at any period of history, has the all-devouring gluttony assumed such a vicious form."

Tagore stood for the freedom of the Press. Referring to the Sedition Bill, he observed:

"The country will fail to hide itself to the extent the Press will be free. If at any time in a dark night, our Mother India, driven to desperation and madness, ever treads on the path of violence, the dogs might not bark in the gate, the city's police commissioner might not know it, the King's watchman might be asleep, but the Mother's bangles are sure to zingle in the Press—they will refuse to be stopped. But if the watchman by his own effort force the zingling bangles to stop, it might be convenient for his sleep but it is a mystery how will it help his watch."

Stripped of metaphors, the above passage clearly says if the Press is muzzled, it will simply drive discontent underground. Discontent cannot be removed by repressive measures, and they will force the country to tread the path of revolution. It will be in the interests of Government to make the Press free, because the psychology of the nation is mirrored there.

Judging the consequences of the Sedition Bill, he said:

"It will be a terrible state for us to grope in mysterious darkness with the Press muzzled. Then our activities will look all the more black before the Government officers. Suspicion will make the

king's rod sharper, and the subjects' hearts will be heavy with moroseness and poisoned with speechless despondence. We are slaves of the English. But the law of nature cannot sanction this. Their stroke will hurt us. With all their resentment, they cannot banish this law of universe. They can strike more vehemently but that will also increase the pain, because, that is the law of God. There is no such prohibitory section in the Penal Code. Heart-burning, if it cannot find expression in words, will begin to gather in heart. I am afraid to think to what extent will the relationship between the king and the subject be deformed in such unhealthy and unnatural state."<sup>1</sup>

If the freedom of the Press is taken away, the true form of foreign domination is exhibited. Repression had one consolation for Indians, said Tagore, because thereby the English recognised the power of Indians. "Conflict with the English has generated heat within us whereby our moribund life-force is being invigorated."

In the days of the partition agitation of Bengal, the Poet sang :

"The more will they tighten their bondage, the more loose will our bondage grow. The more will their eyes grow red, the more will our eyes be opened."

Tagore asked Indians not to submit but to stand erect :

"Where love exists, there is pride in being modest and low, but where it does not exist, whatever be the consequences, keep your heart open and straight, do not submit to meanness, shun begging and do not abandon faith in oneself."

After the "Massacre of Amritsar,"<sup>2</sup> a monumental scandal in the chapter of British rule in India, Tagore was greatly shocked. The letter which was written to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, by Tagore renouncing his Knighthood speaks for itself. It reads as follows :

"Your Excellency,

The enormity of the measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock,

<sup>1</sup> Translated from an article on *Sedition Bill* (Rabindra-Rachanavali, Vol. 10).

<sup>2</sup> The Amritsar tragedy took place in 1919. The Governor of the Punjab was Sir Michael O'Dwyer, General Dyer was in charge of the town and fired on the crowd gathering at Jallianwallabagh without warning, a place bounded on all four sides by houses, to which the only approach was one narrow street.

revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions recent and remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification. The accounts of the insults and sufferings undergone by our brothers in the Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers, possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine as salutary lessons. This callousness has been praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings without receiving the least check from the same authority, relentlessly careful in smothering every cry of pain and expression of judgment from the organs representing the sufferers. Knowing that our appeals have been in vain and the passion of vengeance is blinding the noble vision of statesmanship in our Government which could so easily afford to be magnanimous, as befitting its physical strength and moral tradition, the very least I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings.

And these are the reasons which have, painfully compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of Knighthood which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King at the hands of your predecessor, for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration.<sup>1</sup>

Yours faithfully,  
Rabindranath Tagore.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's request was, however, not granted, although he stopped using the title. Tagore's cold reception in England during his next journey was due to this letter which shook the moral foundation of British rule in India.

Commenting on the Dyer debates in the British Parliament, Tagore in his superb and cutting style wrote :

“The result of the Dyer debates in both Houses of Parliament makes painfully evident the attitude of mind of the ruling classes of this country towards India. It shows that no outrage, however monstrous, committed against us by agents of their Government, can arouse feelings of indignation in the hearts of those from whom our governors are chosen.

The unabashed condonation of brutality expressed in their speeches and echoed in their newspapers is ugly in its frightfulness. The feeling of humiliation about our position under the Anglo-Indian domination has been growing stronger every day for the last fifty years or more ; but the one consolation we had was our faith in the love of justice in the English people whose soul had not been poisoned by the fatal dose of power which could only be available in a dependency where the manhood of the entire population had been crushed down to helplessness.

Yet the poison had gone further than we expected, and it has attacked the vital organs of the British nation. I feel that our appeal to their higher nature will meet with less and less response everyday. I only hope that our countrymen will not lose heart at this but employ all their energies in the services of their country with a spirit of indomitable courage and determination.

The late events have conclusively proved that our true salvation lies in our own hands and that a nation's greatness can never find its foundation in half-hearted concessions of contemptuous niggardliness.

It is the sign of a feeble character to seek for a short-cut to fulfilment through the favour of those whose interest lies in keeping it barred—the one path of fulfilment is the difficult path of suffering and sacrifice. All great boons come to us through the power of the immortal spirit we have within us and that spirit only proves itself by its defiance of danger and loss.”<sup>1</sup>

The Amritsar tragedy shook Tagore to the depth of his being. Mr. C. F. Andrews recorded the evidence in Tagore's *Letters to a Friend* when he wrote : “At the critical moment when the news came about Amritsar I happened to be with him in Calcutta, and it will be impossible for me ever to forget the torture of his mind. . Night

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, July 22, 1920.

after night was passed sleeplessly. At last some relief came to him by renunciation of his Knighthood as a protest against what had been done. For a time it seemed as though Amritsar had shattered all his hopes and aims." But Tagore, however, did not support the move for erecting a memorial upon the spot, Jallianwallabagh, "as a permanent record of the deed of blood." He rather wanted to hide such black memory, as he had abundant faith in humanity.

Tagore in an article contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* narrated his experiences while he was on a lecturing tour in the United States. He was taken to be a political schemer who was out to exploit the good-natured credulity of America. Tagore wrote :

"I was told by some of my best friends there (in America) that powerful propaganda seemed to be working against me in consequence of the desperate protest which I had been compelled to make against the Jallianwallabagh atrocities in our own country, shortly before I had left India. If that was the case, it only supports the idea that your country (that is America) lends herself too easily to all secret spells of insinuation, allowing its crowd psychology to be perpetually handled by clever manipulators."

Tagore was insulted with the suspicion that he was involved in the plot against the overthrow of British rule through active sympathy with violent and terroristic activities. Even when he was abroad, the British propaganda machine was at work in the task of misrepresentation of Tagore's aims and ideals. His relentless criticisms of British rule were sought to be neutralised in this way.

Tagore felt that "human wrongs are not pitiable, they are terrible." Human wrongs corrode those who are in power. If they think that they can disregard human wrongs with impunity, they are wrong ; it is full of danger for those who are in power. For the sake of acquiring and maintaining power, they are to be just. If they fail to be just, they will be overpowered by the wrongs they inflict on humanity. Accordingly, he advised two courses to be followed simultaneously, viz., (1) The strong must be just

to the weak. (2) The weak must cultivate strength. If the strong do not realise their moral responsibility towards the weak, they will invite their own degeneration. If, on the other hand, the weak remain weak, he becomes a menace to the strong and the cause of the downfall of the strong. In India when the upper classes ruled, they forged their own fetters and got themselves clogged in the mud of narrowness and meanness. "Europe is following Brahmin India when she looks upon Asia and Africa as her legitimate fields for exploitation." Europe is weakening herself by falling off from her creative ideals inasmuch as she deceives herself into thinking that she is helping the cause of humanity by helping herself. Tagore, on the other hand, urged that "it is a moral duty for every race to cultivate strength, so as to be able to help the world's balance of power to remain even. We are doing England the greatest disservice by making it easy for her to despise us and yet to rule; to feel very little sympathy for us and yet to judge us."<sup>1</sup> Europe does not understand that the genesis of the war lies in her own "growing scepticism towards her own ideals—those ideals that have helped her to be great. She seems to have exhausted the oil that once lighted her lamp."<sup>2</sup>

Tagore in reply to Miss Rathbone's open letter to some Indian friends, issued in June 1941, struck on the defective chords of British rule in India and gave expression to the following charges :

(1) "After a couple of centuries of British administration, only about one per cent of the population was found to be literate in English, while in the U.S.S.R. in 1932 after only 15 years of Soviet administration, 98 per cent of children were educated."

(2) "What have the British who have held tight the purse-strings of our nation for more than two centuries and exploited its resources, done for our poor people? Look

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, July 11, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

around and see famished bodies crying for bread. I have seen women in villages dig up mud for a few drops of drinking water, for wells are even more scarce in Indian villages than schools."

(3) "Shall we then be grateful to the British, if not for keeping us fed, at least for preserving law and order? I look around and see riots raging all over the country. When scores of Indian lives are lost, our property looted, our women dishonoured, the mighty British arms stir in no action; only the British voice is raised from overseas to chide us for our unfitness to put our house in order."

Tagore, therefore, painfully observed :

"The British hate the Nazis for merely challenging their world mastery and Miss Rathbone expects us to kiss the hands of her people in servility for having riveted chains on ours. A Government must be judged not by the pretensions of its spokesman but by its actual and effective contribution to the well-being of the people. It is not so much because the British are foreigners that they are unwelcome to us and have found no place in our hearts, as because while pretending to be trustees of our welfare they have betrayed the great trust and have sacrificed the happiness of millions in India to bloat the pockets of a few capitalists at home."

The peculiarities of British rule in India are, therefore, to be noted. First, unlike earlier conquerors (which India experienced) the English never "made their home in this country" and "never blended with its people." The proceeds of their loot are spent in England; they live in their isolated areas and scrupulously ban social intercourse. The Moslem conquerors got over this difficulty by settling in India and converting a quarter of the population to their creed.

Secondly, the British in India were primarily merchants, and India was treated as a market for British goods. They sank money in India for carrying on trade and not for developing the country. "From the days of the monopolist Company onwards, the rulers of India have been fighting a slow rearguard action to keep India as long as possible a source of raw materials, a market for British

manufacturers and a field for British investment.”<sup>1</sup> The British Government in India clung to the laissez-faire principles ; the white business community was in charge of foreign trade and internal communications. Indians could not canalise their enterprise on lines best suitable to India. Even to-day Indians cannot make an internal combustion engine which is “ the motor of modern life.” The incubus of British control in India’s economic life is astonishing, and it takes away all the virtues brought about by British rule. The American economist, Professor Buchanan, puts the case of India’s economic situation succinctly :

“Here was a country with all the crude elements upon which manufacturing depends, yet during more than a century it has imported factory-made goods which machinery and organisation had been highly perfected in other countries. With abundant supplies of raw cotton, raw jute, easily mined coal, easily mined and exceptionally high-grade iron ore ; with a redundant population often starving because of lack of profitable employment ; with a hoard of gold and silver second perhaps to that of no other country in the world and with access through the British Government to a money market which was lending large quantities of capital to the entire world ; with an opening under their own flag for British business leaders who are developing both at home and in numerous new countries all sorts of capitalistic industries ; with an excellent market within her own borders and near at hand in which others were selling great quantities of manufactures ; with all these advantages, India, after a century, was supporting only about two per cent of her population by factory industry. . . . While the proportions are gradually changing, Indian economic life is still characterised by the export of raw materials and the import of manufactures. In spite of her factories and her low standard of living, India is less nearly self-sufficient in manufactured goods than she was a century ago.”

The excessive concentration on agriculture, the deliberate destruction of Indian handicraft industry (in the early days of the Company), the costly charges of the administrative apparatus, the pursuit of laissez-faire principles, the encouragement of inordinate profits of a few

<sup>1</sup> *Subject India* by H. N. Brailsford, p. 195.



industries, the system of controls by Government in the opening up of new enterprises, the encouragement of purely literary education, the alarming increase of population with labour forces half-employed and their efforts wastefully organised, the opening up of Indian markets for increasing consumption of British goods, the stereotyping of India's social and economic institutions—all this was deliberately done by the foreign ruling Power.

Thirdly, British rule in India has sapped India's cultural relations with the other Asiatic countries. India's ties with the neighbouring countries were intimate; culturally she influenced many Asiatic countries. Through suicidal effects of British rule, India's attention was diverted to the West; she forgot her old ties; she broke away from Asiatic countries and looked more to the West for inspiration. India, a cultural leader in the East, became a vassal to the West, culturally, politically and economically.

Fourthly, with the introduction of British rule in India, India's rulers ceased to be leaders, and Indian leaders were not her rulers. This divorce accelerated India's frustration and degeneration, and widened the gap between the rulers and the people.

These dark spots of British rule in India were patent to Tagore, and they influenced him greatly in the indictment of the Indian administration, carried on under the aegis of the British Government. Is there any reason for Indians to be grateful to the British for giving India law and order, a strong Government, political and administrative unity,—all dictated in the interests of British investments and British industries? If incidentally we have gained, that is no credit to British rule. Tagore felt most miserable when he found that India's will was paralysed and that a sense of impotence had corroded her mind. There was stagnation all around—the Indian lost his capacity for movement and adaptation to the new forces stirring within society, and the incentive to the discovery

of experimental methods in natural sciences was gone. It was a vicious circle—British rule lamed the sensitive and alert mind of India, and the rigid and inert social structure with leanings towards primitive economy gave Britons the enterprise, the technique and the opportunities to conquer and overpower India. India was turned very soon into a colonial estate for the enrichment of Britain.

### CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH

Tagore never tried to be popular. He had spoken out truths, cruel and unpleasant. He did believe in work—not excitement.<sup>1</sup> “What spark is to flame, excitement is to work. By striking, one can have spark, but that does not dispel the darkness of the room.” He knew that the excitement had its need in bringing out life-force, but that must be harnessed in action. But all around, we find infatuation only, people talking tall and loud with no vision for future and love for the country. So Tagore said :

“Where are the priests of national awakening in India? Wherever they might be, it is true they are not restless, they are not mad, they are not to inflame people’s hearts by speeches with no end in action. They must have brain, heart, devotion, patience, calmness of deep knowledge and a happy combination of will-force and perseverance.”

There was another reason why Tagore had not found fault with the British Government in season and out of season. He had no heart for mere abusing. He did not believe in the “politics of petition.” “If you want prestige, if you want life, life you are to sacrifice first”—this was his politics.

Tagore relied on self-reliance, so he observed :

“I make bold to ask who is there to feel offended standing before the jaw of destruction—who would like to quarrel in our

<sup>1</sup> Mahatma Gandhi also deprecates excitement in the most violent language :

“In civil disobedience, there should be no excitement. Civil disobedience is a preparation for mute suffering.”

death-bed? . . . If the house is on fire, can we remain satisfied by sending for the police? Meantime, when our people would be burnt to death, can we find any consolation in arranging a big meeting to protest against the Sub-Inspector's lethargy to the Magistrate? We should be up and doing, and failure without effort is a scandal—a sin."

He did not like to divert his attention so much to the British Government as to his own people.<sup>1</sup> Rebuking his own countrymen, Tagore said :

"Now we are torn by partisan spirit and narrowness. We cannot be united. We cannot believe in one another. We do not obey any one's leadership. Our institutions burst like bubbles, at first there is much ado, but afterwards they are scattered and deformed, and then they grow lifeless. When we are asked to sacrifice anything, we pretend to be busy—but in the long run we fall back. Anyhow, we want our self-advertisement. We find full satisfaction in self-advertisement and agitation, but afterwards we become drowsy. We cannot settle down to anything which requires patience, labour and devotion. Wonder it is how have we continued with such a weak, immature and worn-out character."

Addressing the youth of Bengal in 1311 B.S. (1904), Tagore observed :

"Unfortunate you are, as you have not found before you the field of action duly ready. But you can count it as a token of good fortune, if you can stand up and say, I shall prepare my own field, and thrice blessed you will be. Be glad that the noble task awaits you—the task of bringing order in the midst of disorder, the task of instilling vitality into the lifeless, the task of calling out humanity from the prison-wall of narrowness. Place reliance on your own

<sup>1</sup> "The Moderates of our country beg from them with folded hands and Extremists beg with eyes red with anger, that is the difference between the two. The former wag their tails before the master's table, and the latter only bark. The Moderates think that they are wise and the Extremists think that they are very heroic. But lo! The cuffs from the British fists and the kicks from the British boots fall equally on the back of both. The crumbs from their master's tables, too, fall equally on both, and they get busy fighting amongst themselves over the division of crumbs. Thus they do not have the time to attend to the work of our country's welfare. Real work remains neglected. Under these circumstances, kicks from the master's boots are more precious to us than crumbs from his table. So even death is better for us than to extend our hands to receive the gifts from such people as the British."—Rabindranath.

strength; respect your own country, and do not lose faith in religion. . . . I am calling today those brave youngmen, those who are ready to start for the perilous path of action which brings no honour, in full recognition of the disaster, in complete acceptance of its difficulties, and without any illusion of immediate reward, wending their way not towards the palace-gate but in search of the mine which embalms the ascetic strength of ancient India."

"No country has upto now achieved political greatness merely by petitioning before Authorities. No country in a state of dependence has been able to keep at bay the economic exploitation by an independent State. No agricultural country can afford to be equal to an industrial country in its riches, luxury and standard of living."<sup>1</sup> The differences between India and the Western countries are fundamental. So we shall court extinction if we go out to compete with them. The task of our renaissance will be to throw our gaze back to the understanding of the real greatness of ancient India. Tagore proclaimed again and again: "India is patiently waiting for the return of her sons back to her own residence. We shall have to return home; no one will give us accommodation outside; we cannot be satisfied for all time to come with the alms in a beggar's bowl."<sup>2</sup>

It brings about no real loss if we lose anything which is received by way of grace from others. In asking us to rely on our self-reliance and to discard the begging attitude, Tagore stated:<sup>3</sup>

"I shall do what can be done by self-sacrifice; I shall get what can be got by self-abnegation; I shall give what can be given by self-immolation. If this is possible, well and good; if this is not to happen, if we cannot feed ourselves without asking for services from others; if we are to remain illiterate on the closing down of schools by others; if purse-strings for the service of the country are not unloosened without the incentive of Government honours, then

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Baroari Mangal* (Welfare of the Public) written in 1908 B.S. (Rabindra-Rachanavali, Vol. 4).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Atyukti* (Exaggeration) written in 1909 B.S. (Rabindra-Rachanavali, Vol. 4).

let us take leave from the face of the earth without blaming anyone. It is better to meet with doom and perdition if anything great is not achieved in our country by our own efforts."

Tagore in a letter to Mr. Andrews in 1920 said :

"Let us forget the Punjab affairs but never forget that we shall go on deserving such humiliation over and over again until we set our house in order. Do not mind the waves of the sea but mind the leaks in your vessel. Politics in our country is extremely petty. It has a pair of legs, one of which has shrunk and shrivelled and become paralytic and therefore feebly waits for the other one to drag it on. There is no harmony between the two, and our politics, in its hoppings and totterings and falls, is comic and undignified. The entreaty and anger which alternately are struggling to find expression in the ludicrously lame member of this tragic partnership, both belong to our abject feebleness. When non-co-operation comes naturally as our final moral protest against the unnaturalness of our political situation, then it will be glorious, because true ; but when it is only another form of begging, then let us reject it.

The establishment of perfect co-operation of life and mind among ourselves must come first, through sacrifice and self-dedication and then will come in its natural course the non-co-operation. When the first completely ripens, it finds its freedom through its fulfilment of truth.

Our country is crying to her children for their co-operation in the removal of obstacles in our social life which for centuries have been hampering us in our self-realisation. We need co-operation in the sacrifice of love more than anything else, to prove to our country that she is ours ; and then we shall have the moral right to say to others : " We have nothing to do with you in our affairs." And for this all the moral fervour which the life of Mahatma Gandhi represents and which he, of all men in the world, can call up, is needed.

That such a precious treasure of power (viz, the moral fervour which the life of Mahatma Gandhi represents) should be put into the mean and frail vessel of our politics, allowing it to sail across endless waves of angry recrimination, is terribly unfortunate for our country, when our mission is to revive the dead with the fire of the soul. The external waste of our resources of life is great owing to external circumstances ; but that the waste of our spiritual resources should also be allowed to happen on adventures that are wrong from the point of view of moral truth

is heart-breaking. It is criminal to turn moral force into a blind force."

Tagore welcomed the connection of India with the West. Europe now has her lamp ablaze ; we must light our torches at its wick and make a fresh start on the highway of time. He was an ardent admirer and a passionate preacher of the wisdom of the East, the truths proclaimed by the ancient sages of India, but he could never suggest that "our forefathers, three thousand years ago, had finished extracting all that was of value from the universe." He, therefore, felt that if India had been deprived of touch with the West, she would have lacked an element essential for her attainment of perfection. So it would not be to our interest if we remain aloof, inactive, irresponsible, unwilling to give and to take. But he never favoured that there would be a blind, foolish, insensate begging at the door of Europe, with our critical sense entirely benumbed. It was his definite opinion that "whether it be wisdom, or political rights, they have to be earned, to be attained by one's own *shakti*. If they be put into our hands by others, by way of alms, they do not become ours at all. To take in a form which is derogatory can only lead to loss." So he advised us to come into touch with what was true, what was best, in the Englishman in a most dignified manner, in the abundance of our own *shakti*. We must approach the Englishman not with bowed heads and folded hands, not in a blind fury of passion. Our servility only attracts pettiness from the Englishman and distorts his true manifestation in India ; our violent outbursts evoke only the sinful side of the Englishman's nature. All these excite his insolence, his greed, his cowardice or his cruelty. It is our manhood which can awaken the best in the Englishman. So he observed in one of his articles in 1909-10 :

"If we find in him (the Englishman) merely a merchant, or a military man, or a bureaucrat, if he will not come down to the plane in which man may commune with man and take him into confidence ; if, in time, the Indian and the Englishman needs must

remain apart, then only will they be to each other a perennial source of unhappiness. In such case the party which is in power will try to make powerless the dissatisfaction of the weaker by repressive legislation, but will not be able to allay it. Nor will the former find any satisfaction in the situation; and feeling the Indian only to be a source of trouble the Englishman will more and more try to ignore his very existence."

It was Tagore's firm conviction, *Nayamatma bala-hinena labhyah* (Self-realisation is not for the weak.) So he observed :<sup>1</sup>

"Neither tall talk nor violence, but only sacrifice and service are the true tests of strength. Until the Indian can give up his fear, his self-interests, his luxury, in his quest for the best and the highest, in his service of the Motherland, our demands from the Government will be but empty begging and will accentuate our incapacity and our humiliation. When we shall have made our country our own by sacrifice and established our claim to it by applying our own powers for its reclamation, then we shall not need to stand abjectly at the Englishman's door. And if we are not abject, the Englishman need not lower himself. Then may we become colleagues and enter into mutual arrangements. . . . Only when she can meet him as his equal, then all causes of antagonism, and with it all conflict, will disappear. Then will East and West unite in India,—country with country, race with race, knowledge with knowledge, endeavour with endeavour. Then will the History of India come to an end, merged in the History of the World."

It is interesting to find that Tagore's enunciation of non-violent struggle for the wresting of human rights, so far as Indian conditions were concerned, was proclaimed at a time when Bengal was in the heat of the anti-partition movement. *Prayaschitta* (Atonement), a drama based on Tagore's novel *Bau-thakuranir-Hat* (The Bride-Queen's Market), was written in 1909, and *Paritran* (Deliverance) which was the revised version of *Prayaschitta* was published in 1929. *Muktadhara* (The Waterfall), another drama written in 1922, was partly based on *Prayaschitta*. In all these dramas, there is one Dhananjoy Bairagi, a

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the authorised translation of Tagore's Interpretation of the East and the West, written in 1909-10.

Sannyasi, who expounds the philosophy and technique of non-violent non-co-operation. Dhananjoy had neither hearth nor home; he advised people not to pay taxes to the King. He was imprisoned, but the jail was reduced to ashes. Dhananjoy came out and sang of the joys of the prison-house. Addressing the Prison, Dhananjoy sang :

“I am not angry with you,  
     If anybody is to blame, it is I,  
 Only if there be fear in my mind,  
     I regard you as terrible.  
 All night long in the darkness  
     You were my comrade.  
 Remembering that kindness of yours  
     I salute you.”

The following dialogues are taken from *Paritrana* (Deliverance), the drama which was based on *Prayaschitta* (Atonement) :

*Third villager* : What shall we say, father, to the King ?

*Dhananjoy* : We shall say, “we won’t pay tax.”

*Third villager* : If he asks, “why won’t you ?”

*Dhananjoy* : We shall say, “if we pay you money starving our children and making them cry, our Lord will feel pain. The food which sustains life is the sacred offering dedicated to the Lord; for he is the Lord of life. When more than that food,—a surplus, remains in our houses, we pay that to you (the King) as tax, but we can’t pay you tax deceiving and depriving the Lord.

*Fourth villager* : Father, the King will not listen.

*Dhananjoy* : Still, he must be made to hear. Is he so unfortunate because he has become king that the Lord will not allow him to hear the truth ? We will force him to hear.

*Fifth villager* : Worshipful Father, he (the King) will win, for he has more power than we have.

*Dhananjoy* : Away with you, you monkeys ! Is this a sample of your intelligence ? Do you think, the defeated have no power ? Their power stretches up to heaven, do you know ?

*Sixth villager* : But, Father, we were far from the King, we could have saved ourselves by concealment,—we shall now be at the very door of the King. There will be no way of escape left if there be trouble.



*Dhananjoy* : Look here, Panchkari, leaving things unsettled in this way by shelving them never bears fruit. Happen what it may, otherwise the finality is never reached. There is peace when the ultimate extremity is reached."

Further *Dhananjoy* told the King on behalf of people :  
 "The food that appeases our hunger is not yours. This food is His who has given us life. How can we give it to you ?"

The King then enquired if *Dhananjoy* had asked his subjects not to pay taxes. *Dhananjoy* replied fearlessly :

"Yes, Maharaj, it is I who have done it. They are fools, they have no sense. They want to part with all they have for fear of the tax-gatherer. It is I do tell them, "stop, stop, don't you do such a thing. Give up your life only to him who has given you life; do not make your King guilty of killing you."

The following extracts are taken from *Muktadhara* (The Waterfall), another drama of great literary success :  
*Ranajit* (king) : So it is you who have made these people forget themselves.

*Dhananjoy* : Yes, Maharaj, and I forget myself also.

*Ranajit* : Don't brand words with me. Will you pay taxes, or not ?

*Dhananjoy* : No, Maharaj, we will not pay.

*Ranajit* : You will not ? And whence such arrogance ?

*Dhananjoy* : I cannot give you what is not yours.

*Ranajit* : Not mine !

*Dhananjoy* : Our excess food may be yours, but the food needful for our hunger does not belong to you.

*Dhananjoy*, when threatened with imprisonment by the King, tells :

"He who gives all, keeps all; greed brings you but stolen goods, and they shall not abide. Herein lies your error, for what you seize by violence can never be yours. That which you set free is yours for ever. Grasp at it, and it eludes your clutching fingers. You dream that you can make the world dance to the tune of your own desire; ills and cross-accidents will prepare for you a rude awakening."

Regarding the strength of non-violence as against

violence, Tagore let Dhananjoy speak in *Muktadhara*. The following dialogues are indeed revealing :

*"1st citizen :* Master, the King's brother-in-law Chanda Pal beats us so that we cannot endure it ; and what is even worse, he does not respect even our Yuvaraj.

*Sardar Ganesh :* Master, only say the word, and I'll get hold of that bully Chanda Pal's stick and show him what beating is.

*Dhananjoy :* Can't you show him what not beating is ? You have plenty of strength I think ? Yet however mightily you beat the waves they do not cease their tossing, and to master them you hold your own rudder steady.

*4th citizen :* Then what do you tell us to do ?

*Dhananjoy :* Strike direct at the root of all violence and injury.

*3rd citizen :* How can that be done, Master ?

*Dhananjoy :* As soon as you can hold up your head and say that nothing has power to hurt you, the root of violence will be cut through.

*2nd citizen :* That is a hard saying, that nothing has power to hurt.

*Dhananjoy :* Nothing can hurt your inner manhood, for that is a flame of fire. Only the animal nature is hurt, for he is flesh ; he feels the blow, and whines and dies. But you stand open-mouthed—do not you understand ?

*2nd citizen :* We understand you, but we do not understand your words.

*Dhananjoy :* Then woe betide you."

According to Tagore, "the true meaning of living is outliving,—the ever growing out of itself." The predominant fact of shell-life is passivity ; but there struggles in us our aspiration for freedom against impediments. Life's journey is endless, but "the gain is at every step ; for it is the road and the home in one ; it leads us on and yet gives us shelter." Things remain and things move—"between these two contrary currents we have found our dwelling place and our freedom." It is to be recognised that man has his mind which reasons and his will which seeks its own path. If they are not in harmony with the surroundings, they break out in discord. But in this

ugliness lies the great hope of the future, because it will give birth to harmony, as nothing remains stationary.<sup>1</sup> Tagore was a great bard who sang of the reconciliation of the opposites. He significantly observed :

“The principle of war and the principle of peace, both together make the truth. They are contradictory : they seem to hurt each other, like the fingers and the strings of a musical instrument. But this very contradiction produces music. When only one predominates, then there is the sterility of silence. Our human problem is not whether we should have only war or only peace, but how to harmonise them. So long as there is such a thing as force, we cannot say that we must not use force, but we must not abuse it by making it the sole standard, and thus ignoring love. When love and force do not go together, then love is mere weakness and force is brutal. Peace becomes death when it is alone ; war becomes a demon when it kills its mate.”

It is felt that there is inherent weakness in the pacifist doctrine, in the doctrine of *ahimsa*. The hard facts of human life seek to controvert the *ahimsa* doctrine of Buddha, because we can hardly make a step forward without a struggle. Evil cannot perish without the destruction of much that lives by the evil. Accordingly, Tagore's *ahimsa* doctrine recognised that strife and destruction were to be harmonised with the saving principles of association and mutual help. Human history bears witness to the inexorable vitality and persistent prevalence of the principle of reconciliation of strife and love. Love by itself is weak. Tagore stated that the strife was a passion belonging to life, but not having the wholeness of life, and as such it was “the most terrible of life's enemies.” But he could not believe in the efficacy of “ahimsa” for the attainment of an immediate political objective. Tagore observed :

“I believe in the efficacy of “ahimsa” as the means of overcoming the congregated might of physical force on which the political powers in all countries mainly rest. But like every other moral principle *ahimsa* has to spring from the depth of mind, and it must

<sup>1</sup> This fascinating subject of dialectics is also discussed in “Notes and Comments” by Tagore in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, July 1926.

not be forced upon man from some outside appeal of urgent need. The great personalities of the world have preached love, forgiveness and non-violence, primarily for the sake of spiritual perfection and not for the attainment of some immediate success in politics and similar departments of life. They were aware of the difficulty of their teaching being realised within a fixed period of time in a sudden and wholesale manner by men whose previous course of life had chiefly pursued the path of self. No doubt, through a strong compulsion of desire for some external result, men are capable of repressing their habitual inclinations for a limited time; but when it concerns an immense multitude of men of different traditions and stages of culture, and when the object for which such repression is exercised needs a prolonged period of struggle, complex in character, I cannot think it possible of attainment."

The above was written with reference to Gandhiji's teaching of *ahimsa* or non-violence in the struggle for wresting political freedom from the British.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, a true vedantist, who worked with Tagore in the founding of the school at Santiniketan, was very much disturbed by the announcement of Lord Morley that the Bengal partition was a settled fact. Upadhyay threw himself heart and soul into the revolutionary movement abandoning the path of constitutionalism. He founded *Sandhya* and excited the countrymen to the white heat of violence by powerful writings in it. Tagore in the preface of *Char Adhyay* (Four Chapters) hinted that Upadhyay had confessed failure of his mission and degradation of his self, resulting evidently from the pursuit of anarchical movement. The novel, *Four Chapters*, showed how Atin, the hero, had fallen from his true self because of association with the terrorist movement. This indictment is more positive than the one found in *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World). The preface to "Four Chapters" created a furore in the country, but Tagore in his reply to the criticisms did not abandon his central point.<sup>1</sup>

Tagore was critical of Gandhi's non-co-operation movement when he found people paralysed in mind and

<sup>1</sup> *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 18.

stupified by the over-powering judgment of Mahatmaji. They did not reason ; they simply followed the path chalked out by Gandhiji. They burnt foreign clothes not at the dictate of any reasoning but at the whip of Gandhi's command. Tagore was sick at the distressing spectacle of smothered minds and paralysed reasoning. He was all along a believer in individual freedom ; he advocated action on the basis of logic and reason. The rule of a dictator he detested. In *Muktadhara* (The Waterfall), a drama of pronounced literary grace, the following dialogues explain Tagore's hatred of the mesmerised nation preferring to follow blindly the leader :

*2nd citizen* : And if we lose you now, to whom shall we turn for strength ?

*Dhananjoy* : Is your strength only in mine ? If you say that, you will make me weak indeed.

*Ganesh* : Do not betray us so ; the strength of us all in you alone.

*Dhananjoy* : Then I am defeated. I must stand aside.

*All* : Why, Master ?

*Dhananjoy* : Would you lose your own souls to possess me ? And do you dream that I can make good so great a loss. You put me greatly to shame.

*1st citizen* : Why do you speak so, Master ? We will do whatever you wish.

*Dhananjoy* : Then leave me and go away.

*2nd citizen* : What shall we do then ? Will you be able to keep away from us ? Have you then no love for us ?

*Dhananjoy* : Better the love that sets you free than the love that smothers your own spirits. Say no more, but go.

When all go away, King Ranajit asks Dhananjoy about the cause of his anxiety. Dhananjoy replies : "I seem to have succeeded in doing what even your Chanda Pal's big stick fails to do. I have told myself all this time that I was strengthening their souls, and today they tell me to my face that I have stolen them away."

*Ranajit* : How has that come about ?

*Dhananjoy* : Simply that the more I excited them the less I was able to mature their minds. When a man has a load of debt, it cannot be paid off merely by making him rush about. They think I am greater than God Himself, that I can write off the debt which they owe to him. And so they cling blindly to me.

*Ranajit* : They have accepted you as their God.

*Dhananjoy* : Yes, and they stop short at me, so they never reach their true God. They cling to me, their outward guide, and I obscure from them Him who could guide them from within.

*Ranajit* : When they come to pay the taxes due to the king you stand in their way ; but when they pay to you the worship due to their God, it wounds you, does it not ?

*Dhananjoy* : Oh, indeed it does. They have spent all their worship on me, and are inwardly bankrupt before God—and He will hold me responsible for their debt.

*Ranajit* : So what is your duty now ?

*Dhananjoy* : I must keep away from them. For if I have brought their minds into bondage, Shiva will surely call me to account."

In a paper on *Satyer Awhan* (The Call of Truth) read at the Calcutta University Institute on the 29th of August 1921, he raised his protest against unreasoning obedience to a particular political programme. He detected the force of compulsion in the non-co-operation movement launched by Gandhi and found people sacrificing their judgment blindly at the behest of the Indian National Congress. The freedom of the soul was sacrificed to achieve political independence within a specified period—this greed was not helpful for the emergence of a really free nation. Gandhiji's promise of *Swaraj* within one year was particularly galling to Tagore, the more so when he found the promise frankly believed in by the people at large. All this could only happen under the influence of magic and not logic, and so Tagore protested against the lowering of the national character and dignity under the all powerful influence of Gandhiji's leadership.

Tagore did not appreciate the cult of charka, because mechanical revolving of charka "demanded from us a minimum power of body and mind and only a somnolent manipulation of an antiquated invention." He despised the cult of charka as it was put forward as the weapon of winning *Swaraj* from a merchant nation by putting pressure on Lancashire. Tagore was never a believer in the seeking

of external means to achieve *Swaraj*. He disapproved the boycott movement, the non-co-operation movement, as "we are constantly thinking of the effect on our masters, of forcing our rulers to come to terms." All this was entirely superficial. He never believed that the country could be awakened by the inanity of ignorant minds. He first postulated that the charka was against the spirit of the modern times, and as such the constant goading of political excitement might bring about a temporary revival, but it was bound to go after a short convulsive career. Secondly, the charka cannot enkindle the force which is necessary for winning *Swaraj*. Tagore did not find in the charka the application of mind, the tenacious pursuit of a purpose which does not permit things to rot and crumble away. He was always pleading for the brave struggle in the fulfilment of a heroic destiny. This led Tagore to state :

"In a country where the majority of the inhabitants are cultivators it is absurd to put repeated emphasis upon their duty to turn the charka instead of urging them to perfect their proper work with the help of a better method and wider knowledge. It would mean an all-India organisation by the people of the country for the improvement of agriculture which would have a far wider range of beneficent activity than one for the propagation of *khaddar*. It would include the development of scientific methods of production on co-operative principles, improved methods of seed distribution, facilities for soil analysis, and the use of suitable manures."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore was ever an advocate of creative work. According to him, "the man at the spinning wheel is merely an automaton ; he spins ; he establishes no relation with others. He is a machine, he is alone, he is detached. But when a person goes out in villages for welfare-work, he may be working alone, but his work is the expression of a desire to meet all the villagers. That is a creative desire. Thus

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Sreemati Rani Devi on the 16th October 1929 (the English translation of which was published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1929).

the one lamp lights the other, and people learn to express themselves. That is *Swaraj*.”<sup>1</sup>

Tagore was conscious that for the animal, there was no *Swaraj*, for it was merely driven by its blind instincts. Man's *Swaraj*, as he put it, only extended as far as his own intelligent self, the master within him, occupied his social consciousness and inspired his creative activities. “The history of man's progress is the history of this extension of *Swaraj* through the dominance of self-thinking, self-confidence and self-respect.”

Tagore had never lent support to a negative philosophy. So he could not ask us to discard science which has brought devastation upon humanity, to scorn power which made the nation aggressive and intolerant. Science is destroying us, power is killing us. But in order to combat power, power is needed; in order to serve humanity, science is required. The fact is that the untruth, the weakness that is in man has been responsible for the abuse of science, of power. It is for Man to discover the ways of staving off the misuse or abuse of a good thing. That can only be done by the reformation of human nature, not by the prescription of an external method, bereft of enlightenment and vitality of action.

Tagore always stood up for a constructive programme. He was not happy with mere destruction; he had no faith in those who behaved in a drunken manner. The following extract from Tagore's novel, “The Home and the World,” is interesting, Bimala's husband Nikhil representing Tagore's ideology:

“As soon as the Swadeshi storm reached my blood, I (Bimala) said to my husband (Nikhil): I must burn all my foreign clothes.

Why burn them? said he (Nikhil), you need not wear them as long as you please.

As long as I please! Not in this life . . .

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on *Charka-o-Swaraj* in Bengali, published in the *Sabujpatra* (a monthly) in 1332 B.S. It explains Tagore's attitude and objections to the cult of charka.



Very well, donot wear them for the rest of your life, then. But why this bonfire business ?

Would you thwart me in my resolve ?

What I want to say is this : why not try to build up something ? You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement.

Such excitement will give us the energy to build.

That is as much as to say, that you cannot light the house unless you set fire to it."

Tagore did not and could not support the boycott movement which was furthered in many parts of the country by violent and forceful compulsion on many of our countrymen. If we have not the patience of arguing with others, if we do not consider it a sin to trample upon the freedom of others, then a spirit indiscipline will pervade all of our efforts. The whole country becomes insane and abnormal when impropriety assumes predominance in the name of propriety.

Tagore very much disliked the farce of forcing opinions down on others. That was dead uniformity, according to him. He recognised the force of construction. If destruction was not a prelude to construction, it was unacceptable to him.

### THE INDIAN SITUATION

The tragedy and the peculiarity of the Indian situation were stressed by Tagore in many of his writings and speeches. The following points are given with a view to helping the reader into an intimate acquaintance with Tagore's way of thinking :

1. The position of India is unique. It is a world problem in miniature, because in no other civilised country are there so many different races and influences. India's task is to achieve national unity by respecting the differences and not by extermination or by forcible conversion. It is

not by making outward adjustments but by overcoming inner obstacles that the unity shall have to be stabilised.<sup>1</sup>

2. With only a small per cent of the population literate, with its mixture of races and religions, with its poverty, its disease and starvation, India has a long, uphill road to travel before she can even begin to think hopefully of independence from foreign rule. But Tagore believed that India would overcome her difficulties and emerge as a great nation, taking her rightful place in the world of the future.<sup>2</sup>

3. The British would make better rulers than any other foreign nation would, it was stated by Tagore. But he deplored the machine-like quality of their administration which had lost all human contacts with India's people, and all this in a heartless and callous fashion brought humiliation and misery to the masses. Their rule brought law and order, but it took away the system of life which centred about the villages.<sup>3</sup> Foreign subjection gives negligibly subordinate place to all those things that are of interest to the people, such as education, sanitation and material prosperity. It breeds a conflict of ambitions and interests, and there is an interminably vicious circle; it affects the growth of individuals and society.

4. The fundamental cause of India's poverty, according to Tagore, was the dislocation of ancient resources, which were contained in the villages; people have lost their centre of balance; there is unbelievable misery in the villages. The masses have lost their zest for life. It was the change in the economic system which dislocated the whole structure of Indian life.<sup>4</sup>

5. The difference between the masses and the upper classes is not merely that of degree but of kind. They

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's interview in Vancouver in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Tagore's interview in Tokyo with the correspondent of the New York Times.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

belong to two different times and to two different worlds. "In our country the educated minority lives in a solitude of illimitable inertia. It is a region which is hardly populated. And therefore, when we talk of freedom, we mean real freedom for an insignificant few. And yet the life-force, the strength of will needed for the attainment of freedom lies hidden in the unfathomed soul of those very people who to-day are as good as non-existent. In a land where the greater part of human resources lies buried and unused, you can never hope to realise the great human wealth which is freedom."<sup>1</sup>

In a disunited country foreign domination is a unifying agency. The process of unification will go on in India under British rule, even though England does not like it. In this view of things, Tagore described British rule as the instrument of divine providence, but he was not impervious to the fiendish policy of England which aimed at making the subjugated country weak, keeping it distracted in disunity, preventing the natural growth of its powers by refusing to allow their exercise and reducing it to lifelessness.<sup>2</sup>

Tagore believed that no permanent good could be gained by one set of men at the expense of another. To put it in Tagore's language, "Britain has been made great by her Empire. If now she tries to keep India weak, her greatness cannot last, but will topple over of itself,—the weakness of a disarmed, affected and starving India will be the ruin of the British Empire."

It was Tagore's favourite thesis that political agitation will not serve our purpose. We cannot gain rights by petitioning ; we are to earn our rights. "Expenditure of words is a mere waste where service alone will do." The Englishman is determined to maintain his hold upon India at any cost ; he is bound to hammer any one who seeks to unloose the bond. The Englishman cannot be

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's interview in Tokyo with a Chinese Delegation in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's article in Bengali "The Way to get it Done." (1905-6)

frustrated by an empty agitation. Tagore observed: "In order to get from the Government what is due from it to the country, up to the last farthing, the only way is to render in our turn the services which our country may expect from us ourselves, likewise to the last farthing. We may demand only by the measure of what we give." That is, it is only by service we can enrich ourselves, make us strong and fit to receive Government favours. He did not favour the rousing of mere indignation against the British Government; he could not appreciate if anger is to be the basis of our political objectives. He, therefore, advised us in the following strain:

"We must give up all such pettiness and found our political work on the broad basis of love of country,—not on dislike of, or dependence upon, others. This dislike and this dependence may seem to be opposite states of mind, but they are really twin branches of the same tree of impotence. Because we decided that our salvation lay in making demands, dislike was born of our disappointment. We then jumped to the conclusion that this new feeling of ours was Patriotism,—gaining at the stroke profound consolation and an elevating pride!"<sup>1</sup>

Tagore, therefore, repeated it again and again in many of his writings during the period of Bengal's partition agitation:

"I do not worry myself over much what the Government does, or does not do for us. I count it silly to be a-tremble every time there is a rumbling in the clouds. First of all, a thunderbolt may or may not fall; secondly, we are not asked to assist in the counsels of the thunderbolt factory, nor will our supplications determine its course; and lastly, if the thunderbolt is at all to be diverted that cannot be done by making a counter-demonstration of feebler thundering, but only by using the proper scientific appliances. The lightning conductor does not fall from the sky, like the lightning itself; it has to be manufactured patiently, laboriously, and skillfully down below, by our own effort."

It is not to be suggested that Tagore advocated a policy of sullen aloofness from Government. He did not,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from authorised translation of Tagore's article in Bengali, "The Way to Get it Done."

He stood for free relationship which might mature into friendship. But in his view, "where relationship is one of give and take on both sides, of an exchange of benefits, there amicable arrangements are always possible, and the gain to both is real. This can only be brought about if we establish our power on the foundation of good work. Mutual concessions between two sides are graceful as well as permanent, pleasing and honourable to both parties." In sum, he did not believe that honourable union could be brought about between a dwarf and a giant. So he passionately pleaded for India to be strong, self-reliant and conscious.

Accordingly, he advocated the building up of a central organisation where all could unite, where thinkers could contribute their ideas and workers their efforts. "Our education, our literature, our arts and crafts, and all our good work would range themselves round such centre and help to create in all its richness the commonwealth which our patriotism is in search of." At this centre of our *shakti*, we are to pay our tribute, devote our time and energy. "To it shall we give, and from it shall we receive, our truest wealth."

Tagore believed that "for the individual as well as for the nation, freedom is always the ultimate goal," but "in our own nature are hidden the obstacles to its attainment, and they must first be removed by work." We must unflinchingly take up each and every incident of our task. We must free our industries, control our education, strengthen our community. He made a distinction between the stormy and the strong, the braggart and the brave, self-assertion and self-realisation. The weak are driven to unseemly demonstration or abject prostration. So he asked us to be strong and to deserve respect. To make the organisation strong, the component units must be developed. He, therefore, advocated the formation of co-operative village centres. Tagore stated in one of his lectures in 1908 :

"They must have their schools, their workshops, their grain golas, their co-operative stores and banks; and they must be assisted and encouraged to found them and taught to maintain them. Each village community should further have its common meeting place both for work and play and where its appointed headman may hear and settle the disputes and differences. So long as the landowner and the tiller of the soil go their respective ways in isolation, neither will thrive. The time has come when co-operative methods must step in and prevent the results of our labour from sliding down that inclined plane which leads into the foreigners' granary. Modern labour-saving appliances must be freely utilised, and this cannot be done without combination. Improved power looms, more efficient sugar-cane-crushing machines, appliances for utilising jute, the manufacture of dairy products on a large scale, all these require the produce of many fields and homesteads to be brought to a common centre."

Tagore incisively observed :

"The Englishman passes through this country like flowing water; he carries no memory of value away with him; his heart strikes no root in its soil. He works with the prospect of furlough in his mind, and even for his amusements he looks to his compatriots alone. His acquaintance with our language is confined to the depositions of witnesses and with our literature to translations in the Government Gazette. How little of his view we subtend we are apt to forget and so every now and then taken by surprise at his callousness towards us. When we blurt out our feelings, he, in turn, naturally considers such expression an exaggeration, which sometimes provokes irritation and sometimes only a smile."<sup>1</sup>

It was a standing complaint with Tagore that the British do not know us, and, in consequence, "thorny hedges are springing up of unscrupulous intermediaries between the rulers and the ruled, giving rise to conditions which are not only miserable, but unspeakably vulgar." "Our British ruler cannot see us clearly through the dust which they themselves raise. Humiliation follows us at every step and in each good work we try to do."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately the visible relationship of Europe re-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from authorised translation of Tagore's article in Bengali "The Way to get it Done."

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. W. W. Pearson, March 6, 1918.

presented by Britain with India is that of exploitation, and its origins are commercial and material. The harshness of such commercial contact oppresses Indians. The chief occupations of Britons in India are the earning of dividends, the administration of an Empire and the extension of commerce. "Europe's warehouses and business offices, her police outposts and soldiers' barracks have been multiplied, while her human relationships have declined."<sup>1</sup> In this wise, whatever is finest in Europe cannot pass through to reach us in the East.

Tagore in a letter to Dr. J. Sunderland of America in 1927 emphasised the point that "so long as the bulk of our people remains steeped in ignorance, unable to know its own mind, it can never attain emancipation for the purpose of its self-revelment in politics according to its own temperament and need." In his opinion, "freedom, like all the other best things in life, cannot be given from outside, but has to be won through the awakened personality of the people truly claiming it with intelligence, feeling and active will." He, therefore, complained that there were nations in the West "who are technically free, and yet, like a bird that has hurt its wings, have not gained true freedom, remaining incapable of building up and using a perfect medium of political self-expression." If a nation lapses into slavery, voluntarily surrendering its freedom of self-government into the hands of a few who have the power to subjugate their minds into dumb and blind obedience, it is not really free. Tagore laid emphasis on "the combined self-discipline of an intelligent and continual public service" so that no country can fall back on the new kind of slavery. This gave shape to Tagore's political ideology. Tagore was conscious that a foreign Government could never allow Indians full opportunity of serving the country and moulding her destiny according to her own best interests, but the fact could not be ignored that "the people

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Prof. Gilbert Murray in 1934.

who cannot intimately identify their own selves with their motherland through comprehensive knowledge, love and labour, the constant co-operation of their intellect and will, have not the real possession of their country." The following extracts from Tagore's letter to Dr. Sunderland will afford the key to the understanding of his ideology :

"The unreasoning acceptance of practices and prohibitions in minute details of life, the complete sacrifice of individual initiative forced upon our unthinking millions by a system of social tyranny more perfectly organised than in any other country of the world, the terribly efficient machinery for a wholesale manufacture of cowards and slaves constantly working in our domestic surroundings, these are the powerful enemies that are in alliance with the evil star of our political misfortune. Our immediate duty is to fight them, to conquer our country from the age-long domination of an intellectual and moral inertia, from the crude materialism ruling in the guise of piety causing immense dissipation of energy and unmeaning suffering and degradation."

Tagore believed that only when Indians were conscious of the real meaning of self-rule within themselves, they could successfully strive to establish it over their outer circumstances. Many of his countrymen misunderstood him when he urged that "all our powers must be directed towards rescuing it from the debris of a ruined antiquity" and that the mind must be freed from the load of dead things. But he could never prescribe short-cuts, as such speedy ways did not guarantee real freedom, freedom which would not degenerate into the ascendancy of a group, unscrupulous in the use of means to maintain its power. He believed, as was urged by Lord Acton, that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The nemesis of freedom achieved through short-cuts in history is not a strange phenomenon. That was Tagore's constant apprehension. This very feeling that the essential liberties are being menaced by some groups or individuals, drunk with power politics, led Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland and other savants to seek the co-operation of Tagore in mobilising the real public consciousness against the bar-



barous tide of fascism. Tagore who believed in the higher destiny of man gave his full co-operation.

According to Tagore, man has viewed the desire to be, that is in him, in two different ways. It means the revelation of Force or Love. Power has volume, weight and momentum. Those who hold power to be supreme strive for success by sacrificing others' wealth, others' rights, others' lives. Encroachment is the essence of the cult of power. "To increase one's bounds one has necessarily to encroach upon those of others. So because the pride of power is the pride of quantity."<sup>1</sup> Hence, Tagore observed: "The principle of power, of which the outward expression is bulk, is neither the final nor the supreme Truth. It has to stop itself to keep time with the rhythm of the universe. Restraint is the gateway of the good. The value of the good is not measured in terms of dimension or multitude. He who has known it within himself feels no shame in rags and tatters. He rolls his crown in the dust and marches out on the open road."<sup>2</sup> He believed that "power grows bloated on the blood of its victim only to perish of surfeit. . . . Man grows gigantic by the proportion of everything for himself; he attains harmony by giving himself up. In this harmony is peace,—never the outcome of external organisation or of coalition between power and power,—the peace which rests on truth and consists in the curbing of greed, in the forgiveness of sympathy."<sup>3</sup>

Power recognises conflict as inevitable and eternal. Love is true freedom, because true freedom is in service itself. It is true that wealth is the symbol of power, but wealth must move and flow in order to be perfect. Power is active; it is movement. But with Tagore mere movement is superficial; it must be a growth and therefore con-

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's Notes and Comments, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, January 1929.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

tinual gaining. "Power, when it reaches its end, stops and grows careful of its hoarding. Love, when it reaches its end, reaches endless and therefore is not afraid of spending its all."

Tagore, therefore, was very critical of power politics. In his conception of social democracy there was no ascendancy of groups, no domination of individuals, simply because they have got into power. He was keen on the wealth of the soul which was measured by its sacrifice. So he found the revealment of man in service, the fulfilment of wealth in the continuous movement for the elimination of poverty. He hated accumulation and hoarding, the instinct of those who accept power as the final truth. This led him to carry on a crusade against Fascism, Imperialism, machine civilisation based on profit, violent revolution pushed through forcible extinction, and the social scheme of things which is not based on mutual trust, understanding, forgiveness, sympathy and love. Hence, his sincere prayer was : "From unreality lead me to the real, from darkness to the light, from death to immortality."

In the past the gulf between the rich and the poor in India was not wide because of many reasons. First, riches came last in order of merit. Secondly, the rich acknowledged their responsibilities. Thirdly, honour and dishonour did not depend on the command or lack of money. Fourthly, the enjoyment of riches was not exclusive ; the riches of one meant the welfare of many. Fifthly, wealth did not create barriers between man and man, but rather it gave facilities for varied intercourse. To-day the gulf between opulence and want is yawning because wealth has degenerated into an agency for material self-aggrandisement.<sup>1</sup> If self-gratification is exclusive, we are either slaves of ourselves or of others. "In the slave life of these, tied together by necessity, but with no internal

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's notes and comments published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1928.

bond of relationship, envy and rivalry are rearing their heads higher and higher, and the churn of competition is throwing up untruth and hurtfulness on every side." Tagore, therefore, stated :

"The task that lies before us today is to make whole the broken-up communal life, to harmonise the divergence between village and town, between the classes and the masses, between pride and power and spirit of comradeship. Those who rely on revolution seek to curtail truth in order to make it easy. When they are after enjoyment, they shun renunciation; when they incline to renunciation, they would banish enjoyment from the land and subdue man's mind by cramping it. What we, of Visva-Bharati, say is that the nature of man is but deprived if truth be not offered to him in its wholeness, and from such deprivation comes his disease and his despair."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore sincerely believed that "man grows gigantic by the proportion of everything for himself; he attains harmony by giving himself up." In the prose play *Achalayatan* (The Immovable Stronghold) Tagore opposed fossilised orthodoxy. It describes the institution of orthodox Hindu society, surrounded by high ramparts, cut off from the outer world. The desire for liberation acts. There is the attack on *Achalayatan* which gives way. The orthodox citizens become nervous. It is to be rebuilt in harmony with the message of freedom. Tagore pointed out that an ancient truth, if maintained by compulsion, would lose all force and wisdom. He advocated free intercourse with the world outside, cheerful acceptance of truth from without and liberation from the fossils of traditions. Man's longing for free and natural development was lyrically presented by Tagore in his three-act play, *Dakghar* (The Post-Office), where Amal, suppressed by those around him, was to be reborn in a world of freedom. This urge for liberation found powerful expression in the play, *Muktadhara* (The Waterfall). The problem of *Achalayatan* was treated delicately in *Rakta Karabi* (Red Oleanders). Herein there

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

was the struggle of life against that which stifled it. In *Kaler Jatra* (The March of the Ages) Tagore dealt with the problem of untouchability and proclaimed humanity's highest assets in man's creative energy and generosity. His *Taser Des* (A Land of Cards) was a satire on conservatism, conventionality, inactivity and retrogressiveness.

Tagore was essentially modern. Traditions that impede the path of progress are to be scorned. A true Indian must be above all meanness and traditions. In his famous novel, *Gora*, he showed that Gora, the hero of the novel, could not be truly an Indian patriot so long as he was a protagonist of the old traditions of orthodoxy. But when he knew that he was really the son of Irish parents, he felt suddenly the load of fossilised traditions lifted off from his mind, and then and then only could he be a true Indian. After this new baptism, Gora came and told Paresh Babu, the torch-bearer of India's liberal culture :

"Can you follow what it is that I am trying to say? That which day and night I have been longing for but which I could not be, today at last I have become. To-day I am really an Indian. In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussalman and Christian. To-day every caste in India is my caste, the food of all is my food! Look here, I have wandered through many parts of Bengal, and have accepted hospitality in the lowest village homes—do not think that I have merely lectured before city audiences—but I have never been able to take my seat beside all equally—all these days I have been carrying about with me an unseen gulf of separation which I have never been able to cross over. Therefore, in my mind there was a kind of void which I tried by various devices to ignore. I tried to make that emptiness look more beautiful by decorating it with all kinds of artistic work. Because I loved India better than life itself I was quite unable to bear the least criticism of that part of it which I had got to know. Now that I have been delivered from those fruitless attempts at inventing such useless decorations I feel, Paresh Babu, that I am alive again."

That should be the stand of a true Indian, progressive in views, liberal in outlook, unloaded by unmeaning traditions but intensely believer in India's culture without disrespect to the other cultures of the world.

The caste-idea is a collective idea in India, but it ceased to be creative when it became merely institutional. It adjusts human races according to some mechanical arrangement; it emphasises the negative side of the individual—his separateness; it hurts the complete truth in man.<sup>1</sup> But India's caste system was basically the outcome of the spirit of toleration, a serious attempt to solve the race problem with a view to affording each race freedom within its boundaries. India achieved a measure of success, as it evolved social unity within which all the different peoples were held together. India did not follow the Western method of annihilation.

It is true that Tagore was a great admirer of India's spirit of religious toleration. India has allowed all kinds of religious faith and practice to flourish side by side. But he was equally alive to the indiscriminate spirit of toleration which allowed all sorts of religious creeds and crudities to run riot in India. This made it difficult for people to realise the true foundation of India's religious faith. In Tagore's view, "truth cannot afford to be tolerant where it faces positive evil; it is like sunlight which makes the existence of evil germs impossible."<sup>2</sup> He pointed out that "to-day Indian religious life suffers from the lack of a wholesome spirit of intolerance which is characteristic of creative religion."<sup>3</sup>

Soviet Russia made a deep impression on his mind, because he found there the amazing intensity in spreading education among the masses. It appealed to him because he believed that social evils could be extirpated by the imparting of true education, and he was distressed to find in India millions being denied the light of education. In his "Letters From Russia," he extended sincere appreciation to Russia for the banishment of illiteracy, but as an

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Creative Unity*, P. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's interview with Romain Rolland at Geneva in 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

individualist, he could not but tell his Russian friends in a farewell message :

“Are you doing your ideal a service by arousing in the minds of those under your training, anger, class hatred and revengefulness against those not sharing your views? You are working for a great cause. Therefore, you must be great in your mind, great in your mercy, your understanding and your patience. There must be disagreement where minds are allowed to be free. It would not only be an uninteresting but a sterile world of mechanical regularity if all our opinions are forcibly made alike. If you have a mission which includes all humanity, you must, for the sake of the living humanity, acknowledge the existence of differences of opinion. Freedom of mind is needed for the reception of truth.”

Tagore wrote in 1941 in *Arogya* (a book of poems) that Empires in India had been built up and that they had vanished. Pathans with their imperial greed, Moghuls with their crescent banner fluttering high, had come and left. English bands fiery with their pride of power had come. Tagore wrote :

“They too will vanish,  
     their far-flung net round the world  
     will be swept away  
         by the tide of time,  
     and not the faintest trace  
     will they leave behind them  
     on this vast and empty space.”

This was Tagore’s “vision” which was recorded in one of his latest poems in *Arogya*. His vision arose from the deep conviction that “bloodshot eyes and blood-stained hands hide in history’s pages.”

Tagore had stated that “great civilisations have flourished in the past in the East as well as in the West because they produced food for the spirit of man for all time ; they had their life in the faith in ideals, the faith which is creative.”<sup>1</sup> In the world’s history races have perished either for unpardonable weakness or sinful lust of power. The East goes down because she is weak, broken up and lost in the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s lecture in China in 1924.

sluggish search after truth ; the West is being broken to pieces by the blind passion of power.

When the European war of 1939 broke out, Tagore found that it was due to power politics. Power fills its store-room with looted goods ; it identifies possessiveness with the principle of right ; it poisons human minds. Hence, in the subterranean depths of history rumbling earthquakes herald fresh disasters, because barbed obstacles are raised in the path of human understanding. That the war is caused by naked barbarism has been the lesson of history.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Upanishads, the complete aspect of truth is in the reconciliation of the finite and the infinite, of ever-changing things and eternal spirit of perfection. When in our life and work the harmony between these two is broken, then either our life is thinned into a shadow, or it is set on fire. That justifies Tagore's vision that "they too will vanish."

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's address at Santiniketan Mandir on the 7th of Pous (23rd December 1939).

## CHAPTER VII

### IDEALS OF EDUCATION

The vision of truth is obstructed by ignorance, and “in the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is the deliverance from *avidya*, from ignorance.”<sup>1</sup> The primary task is, therefore, to rid our mind of *avidya*, our ignorance. Tagore considered education essential for the attainment of the true, the complete life. Perfect knowledge is the basis of all true freedom ; it is *avidya* which forges fetters that bind. That is why the wise man comes and says: “Set yourselves free from the *avidya* ; know your true soul and be saved from the grasp of the self which imprisons you.”<sup>2</sup>

Education is unsatisfactory, chaotic and meaningless, primarily because we ignore the basic question that education has intimate relation to the social system in which and for which it is to be carried on. T. S. Eliot rightly points out that “to know what we want in education we must know what we want in general ; we must derive our theory of education from our philosophy of life.”<sup>3</sup> Tagore had a philosophy of life, and his theory of education was accordingly shaped. Generally, education is dominated by the ideal of attaining technical efficiency in order to get on in life. It is incomplete education, according to Tagore.

The fundamental factor contributing to the moribund state of affairs in the country is that our development is stunted by outward circumstances, and the tragedy can, to some extent, be mitigated if we know how to train ourselves. This is a question which in spite of its paramount importance has failed to attract our close attention, but

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Sadhana*, P. 72.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot's *Point of View*, P. 154.



that is the only remedy of the ills we suffer from. Government are scandalously negligent and people coldly indifferent. There are occasional cries of "more light" and "more grants" which mark the limit of our propaganda for education. But we do not know education in its real sense. Our boys grow into youth and from youth into manhood only to suffer defeat in the struggle of life; we never care for their nourishment, and as a result, their minds remain undeveloped, and therefore unsuited to the conditions of modern life. They wend their weary ways only to be crumbled on the rock of life.

Truth is that we have no ideals. We have fallen from whatever we had. A structure is not known by its massiveness but by its perfection; the stability of a building rests on the firmness of the base. An analysis of Tagore's ideals and suggestions will go a great way in dispelling the hazy ideas about education, and it will broaden the base of national consciousness. Bertrand Russell points out that "education has two purposes: on the one hand to form the mind, on the other hand to train the citizen. The Athenians concentrated on the former, the Spartans on the latter. The Spartans won, but the Athenians were remembered."<sup>1</sup> Tagore's ideals of education were attuned to the development of mind and the training of the citizen. Even in his boyhood Tagore protested against "the tight-fitting encasement of the school which being like the shoes of mandarin women pinched and bruised my nature." Training from childhood should begin in an atmosphere, free, sympathetic and suggestive. Emphasising the need of education in a free atmosphere, he said:

"The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it. And this the regular type of school ignores with an air of superior wisdom, severe and disdainful. It forcibly snatches away children from a world full of the mystery of God's own handiworks, full of the suggestiveness of personality. It is a mere method

<sup>1</sup> *The Scientific Outlook* By Bertrand Russell, P. 251.

of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. It is a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results for, according to the school, life is perfect when it allows itself to be treated as dead, to be cut into symmetrical convenience."

We do not make room for joy in education. That is a great need. Man's religion is not wholly confined within the bounds of necessity. Boys should be allowed to read something which is not necessary from the wordly point of view. But our system of education stands in the way. We think it is a waste of time for boys to read out-books for pleasure. But dull necessity is hardly creative. So boys read; they pass but they never learn. They suffer under the heavy load of syllabus, and the so-called discipline chills their enthusiasm. They are piling up bricks, but they are not building. In the graphic description of a class-room, Tagore stated :

"It is just at this critical period that the child's life is brought into the educational factory—lifeless, colourless, dissociated from the context of the universe, within bare white walls staring like eyeballs of the dead. We had the God-given gift of taking delight in the world, but such delightful activity was fettered and imprisoned, stilled by a force called discipline which kills the sensibility of the child mind, the mind which is always on the alert, restless and eager to receive first-hand knowledge from Mother Nature. We had to sit inert, like dead specimens of some museum, whilst lessons were pelted at us like hailstones on flowers."

Tagore, therefore, complained : "When I was young I underwent the mechanical pressure of a teaching process, one of man's most cruel, and most wasteful mistakes. I felt it my duty to found a school where the children might be free in spite of the school." The education of the child is the most important work in the building up of the life of the nation. Dr. Maria Montessori has developed the point lucidly in one of her pamphlets :

"The child who has never learned to act alone, to direct his own actions, to govern his own will, grows into an adult who is easily led and must always lean upon others. The school child, being continually discouraged and scolded, ends by acquiring that mixture of distrust of his own powers and of fear, which is called shyness and

which later, in the grown man, takes the form of discouragement and submissiveness, of incapacity to put up the slightest moral resistance. The obedience which is expected of a child in the home and in the school—an obedience admitting neither of reason nor of justice—prepares the man to be docile to blind forces. The punishment, so common in schools, which consists in subjecting the culprit to public reprimand and is almost tantamount to the torture of the pillory, fills the soul with a crazy, unreasoning fear of public opinion, even an opinion manifestly unjust and false. In the midst of these adaptations and many others which set up a permanent inferiority complex, is born the spirit of devotion—not to say of idolatry—to the *condottieri*, the leaders.”

Tagore wanted to train up human beings for freedom, for justice, for peace. Accordingly, in his school he brought about an atmosphere of freedom, of sympathy and of service. These are Tagore’s cardinal ideals of education. Aldous Huxley rightly observed<sup>1</sup> :

“ You cannot reach a given historical objective by walking in the opposite direction. If your goal is liberty and democracy, then you must teach people the arts of being free and of governing themselves. If you teach them instead the arts of bullying and passive obedience, then you will not achieve the liberty and democracy at which you are aiming. Good ends cannot be achieved by inappropriate means. The truth is infinitely obvious. Nevertheless, we refuse to act upon it. That is why we find ourselves in our present predicament.”

Tagore’s ideals of education sprang from reverence for human personality. He made children happy in an atmosphere of freedom, and he found his own freedom “ through trust, through my faith in human nature and child nature.”<sup>2</sup> Tagore believed in the human approach to educational problems, and through education he wanted to bring about a desirable social order.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, Pp. 184-85.

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell also complained that educational authorities did not look upon children as human beings with souls to be saved; they regarded them as material for grandiose social schemes, future hands in factories or bayonets in war. In his opinion, “ no man is fit to educate unless he feels each pupil an end in himself, with his own rights and his own personality, not merely a jig-saw puzzle or a soldier in a regiment or a citizen in a State.”

<sup>3</sup> Mahatma Gandhi’s scheme of Basic Education, intended for boys and girls

Mere book knowledge does not interest the child so as to hold his attention fully. "The brain gets weary of mere words." This widens the scope of learning through other ways, so that the child may be fit physically, mentally and emotionally. As a result of imperfect, wrong and undesirable education, we may earn academic degrees, but not the strength to reconstruct ourselves. We grow in age, but we do not attain maturity. This physical and mental poverty pained Tagore greatly. No nation can be alive and strong, unless the child receives proper education, not mere book knowledge. The emphasis on book knowledge was given in our country by the foreign rulers on political considerations. We Indians felt attracted to it, and we continued our educational policy with undue emphasis on book knowledge. We are educated to be clerks, but not architects of our nation. Every Imperial Government opposes true enlightenment, and the strength of foreign Government lies in "the people's ignorance." Our Government are really spreading darkness, although they pretend to be busy with the enlightenment of people. Our so-called educationists talk eloquently of Government's educational policy; they do not know that they are thus acting as agents of foreign rule in our country. Tagore broke away from the established educational policy aimed at the training of clerks; he stood for the enlightenment of people; he knew that a true democratic Government was possible when people had received education on correct lines. It is also an important part of education to make children healthy and vigorous, active in habits and graceful in movement, eager to learn, able to look after them-

between the ages of seven and fourteen, is education through work, education in and by the love of work. As children learn to love work, so they will derive learning from work. "Doing" and "learning" will become one joint process. The Chinese wall of books is overthrown for healthful knowledge through work. Work is the basis of life, and from the cradle to the grave education should be through activity and work. To quote Gandhiji, "the child should learn the why and wherefore of every process."

selves, companionable and willing to respect the rights of others, and competent to shoulder the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Suitable provision for the training of the children must begin from the earliest stage. Tagore turned to this vital task unaided, and he began his experiments at Santiniketan. With Tagore, true education is the basis of all constructive work. If education is wrong, or if there is no education, all welfare-efforts will, sooner or later, diverge from the announced objectives. That is inevitable; there can be no healthy expansion of society without the true enlightenment of its members. Those who think that education can wait are really creating conditions for the perpetuation of an exploiting economy; they are the greatest enemies of human dignity. It will, therefore, be a profound error if we miss Tagore's emphasis on true education.

Tagore enunciated that the aim of the school should be the highest degree of individual development in each of its pupils. That "the individual is the instrument, the State is the end" is brought forward by the forces of reaction. Those who advocate education for "bullying and subordination" think that private religion, a private world-outlook, in a word all forms of private existence have ceased to have meaning and that "we stand with our personal life in the service and responsibility to the totality of the community life whose members we are." Tagore rejected these doctrines of counter-revolution. It is true that the primary duty of national education is to develop "a strong sense of national obligation" and to render the citizen capable of "serving the State's needs", but in the understanding of the State's needs, there must be a free play of ideas and free criticisms by individual citizens. He could not accept the view that true education would in any way stifle the very essence of freedom (that is, free play of ideas). Free minds, nurtured on free criticisms, must seek for profound changes in the foundations of society resulting in the triumph of reason over human conduct. They

thus endanger all counter-revolutionary forces in history. Tagore strove for the unfettered exercise of reason ; he thus helped the broadening of the arena of revolutionary spirit. He saw in the monolithic power of the State the germs of counter-revolutionary forces<sup>1</sup> and an attempt to prevent the access of masses to social benefits. Conditions in the existing Indian society are showing up contradictions which seek to arrest " the objective movement of history." Tagore tried to harness the creative activities of society for the fulfilment of a continuous purpose, as he could not accept the postponement of human efforts to move forward in the path of progress.

Tagore was a great advocate of the medium of instruction through the mother-tongue. In a speech read before the Rajshahi Association in 1892 which was published under the title of *Siksher Her-Pher* (Topsy-turvydom in Education), Tagore pointed out the folly of imparting education through the vehicle of a foreign language. English is a completely alien tongue ; its rules of syntax and composition are different from the Bengali language ; its association of ideas and choice of themes are foreign ; education we receive through the aid of the English language is " inadequate to the life that we shall be living." We may pass our examinations, but our intellect is not properly strengthened or matured ; we merely commit to memory what is indispensably necessary. There is no joy, no expansion, no blossoming of our faculties. Naturally, the power of assimilation and rejection is not stimulated. The best period of our boyhood is wasted under the load of lifeless grammars and foreign dictionaries. " From

<sup>1</sup> Counter-revolution denies the validity of historical movements. It sets the country back ; it shows that there is an ebb-tide in the history of the country. If social order fails to give the masses " a sense of expanding horizons " and denies benefits to people, the emergence of counter-revolutionary spirit is to be recognised, much more so when conscious efforts are put up by a militant minority to stifle the free flow of social justice through appropriate institutions and measures. All this can only be broken by revolutionary means.

boyhood we pass to adolescence, from adolescence to young manhood, dragging a load of mere words. In the domain of *Saraswati* we can never be more than unskilled labourers. Our backs grow bent, but there is no all-round development of our manhood." This is bound to be because "our text-books paint us no noble picture of that household in which we shall pass all our days; our newly acquired literature holds up no high ideal for the society in which we shall have to spend our lives; we do not meet in its pages our fathers and mothers, dear ones and friends, brothers and sisters; the every-day work of our lives finds no place in its descriptions; there resounds in it no music of our sky or of our earth, our stainless dawns and lovely evenings, our corn-fields rich in grain, the streams which endow our land with plenty."<sup>1</sup> Thus, our life's essential needs are not satisfied by our education, and our book-world and our living world lie on opposite shores with no bridge to unite. This impenetrable barrier is the result of education through a foreign tongue. "We study words unaccompanied by any ideas, and when we grow up the exact opposite happens—ideas come to us, but we have no words to express them."<sup>2</sup> In this wise, the essential harmony between our thought, language and life is lost. "Man is thus divided and frustrated; he can achieve no organic integrity within himself and so can make no firm stand; he cannot put his hand at the right time on what he needs."<sup>3</sup> This sense of national frustration weighed greatly on Tagore, and one of the objects of his educational experiment at Santiniketan was to train children in the proper use and enjoyment of their mother-tongue. Cultural conquest was, with Tagore, a tragedy of infinite magnitude. That tragedy must be somehow prevented.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Siksher Her-pher* (Topsy-turvydom in Education). Its English translation appears in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, vol. XI, Part III, November 1945 to January 1946.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Our University education is radically wrong. The fundamental defect in our system is that we are not educated to know ourselves. Arrangements have not been made for knowing India, her history, philosophy, literature, art and religion. The syllabus does not provide any scope for special interest in things Indian. But it is the bounden duty of each race to keep alight its own lamp of mind. Unfortunate is the nation that has no light, but still more unfortunate is the nation that having it has forgotten all. India has a culture of her own. She has her mind. The best education for India is to enable the mind of India to find out this truth. There is no University in India where Indian mind can be known. "Educational institutions in our country are India's alms-bowl of knowledge; they lower our intellectual self-respect; they encourage us to make a foolish display of decoration composed of borrowed feathers." The result is we reproduce—but we donot produce. The present system of education does not help boys to think for themselves. They are trained to obey blindly—not to develop individually. Such obedience, though extolled as the central bond of rule, does not lead to any ultimate good. The morphia of obedience is being administered on so liberal a scale that we cannot on leaving the University portals recover individuality and free thinking. The Calcutta University Commission in 1919 in its report stated that the whole system of education was suffering from "anaemia."

The spring-force of our University education has been to gain, not to grow. There are three things necessary :

First, the mind of India is to be known and made conscious of itself, as a preliminary to education.

Secondly, in education the important factor is the atmosphere of creative activity. Full scope must be given for the work of intellectual exploration and creation. "Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living and growing knowledge."

Thirdly, education must be in complete touch with our



life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual. "True education is to realise at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings."

None of the above factors count in our present-day education. So we are thoroughly disgusted with it. We desire a wholesome change. Tagore did not fall in with the idea that the D.P.I. would control our education. The imposition of much too discipline is equally harmful. He quoted Tolstoy to prove the harmful effects of State interference.<sup>1</sup> "It seems to me that it is now specially important to do what is right quietly and persistently, not only with asking permission from Government but consciously avoiding its participation. The strength of Government lies in the people's ignorance, and Government knows this and will therefore always oppose true enlightenment. It is time we realise this fact. And it is most undesirable to let Government, while it is spreading darkness, pretend to be busy with the enlightenment of the people. It is doing this now by means of all sorts of pseudo-educational establishments which it controls—schools, high schools, Universities, academics and all kinds of committees and congresses."

State-controlled and, in our case de-nationalised, education cannot but starve the mind of the nation. Our educational institutions are only nurseries of slaves. We pass our examinations and shrivel up into clerks, lawyers and police inspectors, and we die young. And what is the merit of an examination? It is a deliberate cultivation of disloyalty to truth, of intellectual dishonesty, of a foolish

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell is also of the same opinion: "Almost all education has a political motive; it aims at strengthening some group, national, religious or even social, in competition with other groups. It is this motive in the main which determines the subjects taught, the knowledge offered, and the knowledge withheld and expected to require. Hardly anything is done to foster the inward growth of mind and spirit; in fact, those who have had most education are very often atrophied in their mental and spiritual life, devoid of impulse, and possessing only certain mechanical aptitudes which take the place of living thought."

imposition by which "the mind is encouraged to rob itself." As a result, our educated community is but a community of qualified candidates. We have no culture to smoothe our relations with the world around, and to broaden our outlook, to help us in creation and to show the way to growth. Our education is not creative ; it does not provide us with any mental sustenance.

There are two vital defects under which we are labouring, and we have to eradicate them wholly.

(1) For the perfect irrigation of learning, foreign language cannot be a true channel. First, it is a waste of time. Secondly, it is difficult to accommodate the English language in our minds. Thirdly, there is hardly any competent Bengali teacher with a proper grounding in English. Fourthly, it is a terrible waste of national material to cut off all higher educational facilities from the thousands of pupils who have no gift of acquiring a foreign tongue but who nevertheless possess the intellect and desire to learn. Fifthly, the cost we pay to our alien ruler is the sacrifice of our own knowledge and culture upon which depends the salvation of the motherland for all time to come.

Different languages of India should not deter us from the adoption of the mother-tongue as the medium of education. In Europe, there was Latin first, the only language for education, just like Sanskrit in ancient India. But latterly every country developed in its own way, and thus the contributions of Europe were varied and unique. The Poet said : "The diversity of our languages should not be allowed to frighten us ; but we should be warned of the futility of borrowing the language of our culture from a far-way land, making stagnant and shallow that which is fluid near its source."

(2) We have no human and competent teacher. Tagore in his own inimitable style voiced forth the grievance :

"To our misfortune, we have in our country all the furniture of the European University except the human teacher. We have

instead been merely purveyors of book-lore in whom the paper-god of the book-shop seems to have made himself vocal. And as a natural result, we find our students to be untouchables even to our Indian professors. These teachers distribute their doles of mental food, miserly and from a dignified silence, raising walls of note-books between themselves and their students. This kind of food is neither relished, nor does it give nourishment. It is a famine ration strictly regulated to save us not from emancipation but only from absolute death. It holds out no hope of that culture which is far in excess of man's mere necessity. It is certainly less than enough and far less than a feast."

We should divert our attention to the three aspects of education—cultural aspect, aesthetic aspect and economic aspect.

There are some people, intoxicated with the wine of modernism, who believe that our past is bankrupt, "leaving no assets for us but only legacy of debt." Blessed they are in their ignorance. Referring to these vaunted people, Tagore observed :

"It is well to remind them that the great ages of renaissance in history were those when men suddenly discovered the seeds of thought in the granary of the past. The unfortunate people who have lost all the harvests of their past have lost their present age. They have missed their seeds for cultivation and go a-begging for their bare livelihood. The time has come for us to break open the treasure grove of our ancestors and use it for our commerce of life. Let us with its help make our future our own—never continue our existence as the eternal rag-picker at the other people's dustbins."

The aesthetic aspect is not cared for in our present system of education. Culture thus becomes narrow and life mutilated. Music and art are the highest means to national expression. Without them, people would remain inarticulate. Tagore said :

"In the proposed centre of our culture, music and art must have their prominent seats of honour, not merely a tolerant nod of recognition. The different systems of music and different schools of art which lie scattered in the different ages and different provinces of India and in the different strata of society, have to be brought there together and studied. Thus a real standard of aesthetic taste will be formed by the help of which our own art of expression will grow in strength and riches enabling us to judge all foreign arts with

the soberness of truth and appropriate from them ideas and forms without incurring the charge of plagiarism."

Tagore complained that we had known the West where it was learned, masterful and powerful, but not where it was artistically creative. That was the reason why modern Europe had not been revealed to us in complete personality. Europe has only touched our intellect—not our heart. Heart finds expressions only in creation—not in scholarship. It is an evidence of culture if we learn to prize the artist more than the scholar. Unhappily, we are moving the other way about which means a sad and serious reflection on our education and incidentally on our educationists.

Tagore, however, cautioned us that we could not afford to be Western. The Eastern mind is there, "it is in your blood, in the marrow of your bones, in the texture of your flesh and in the tissue of your brains." So the idea of an Eastern University was in the Poet's mind. In his view, the centre of our culture should also be the centre of our economic life. It must cultivate land, breed cattle, feed itself and its students; it must produce all necessary accessories devising the best means and using the best material, calling science to its aid. "In a word, it should be a complete world in itself, self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever-renewing life, radiating light across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies, imparting life-breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds and aspiring towards spiritual freedom."

Culture is international in character. The East has a culture of its own. Therefore, the East for its own sake and for the sake of the world must not remain unrevealed. Hitherto, the meeting of the East and the West has remained incomplete because occasions thereof have been commercial. For the sake of culture, we would make some arrangements for a common meeting ground—where we can be free from the subterfuge of conflicting interests.

This is the age of co-ordination and co-operation. "The seedlings that were reared within narrow plots must now be transplanted into open fields. . . . We may hug our holy aloofness from some imagined security of a corner but the world will prove stronger than our corner, and it is our corner which will have to give way receding and pressing against its walls till they burst on all sides." The keynote of the age is the adjustment of knowledge through comparative study. There should be no distrust of foreign culture because of its foreign character.

It is high time that India must base her own structure on a synthesis of different cultures. To quote Tagore, "my suggestion is that we should generate somewhere a centripetal force which will attract and group together from different parts of our land and different ages all our own materials of learning and thus create a complete and moving orb of Indian culture." India shall have to assert, otherwise the "whole world will grow into an exaggerated West, and such an illimitable parody of the modern age will die, crushed beneath its own absurdity." We must not be merely hangers-on of world culture. We must unfold our own culture. "We must know that this concentration of intellectual forces of the country is the most important mission of a University, for it is like the nucleus of a living cell, the centre of the creative life of the national mind."

Tagore himself started a University in 1921 in pursuit of his ideals. It represented his constructive attempt to prove that Indians were not born to be serfs, "permanently bending under the burden of another's intellectual acquisitions." The objects of the Poet's *Visva-Bharati* (International University) are :

"To study the mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.

To bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.

To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia.

To seek to realise in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres."

Tagore realised the need of a University for women. They must have a centre of their own. In his Vancouver tour, he was stated to have told an interviewer :

"Now I have one dream before me. It is to establish a University for women in India. I believe that the women have peculiar gifts that must be developed in their own University. And unless the women of the world can create as much as do men, they inevitably hold men also backwards."

He was profoundly impressed with what he saw in Russia, especially in the field of education. He stood for complete education ; he sought to make of man a creative personality. In his view, that is the greatest, the highest ideal of humanity—the ideal of giving the hidden wealth of the human mind a chance to express itself. Tagore in the course of a reply to the address of welcome at Moscow observed :

"Since I have come to this place I have been able to realise that your ideal of education is very similar to mine, that the people are living a complete life through which their mind is prepared to receive education in its full richness and not merely hoard up isolated facts of scientific instruction and information. You have been stimulating the people's mind for creative work which is highest privilege of man."

He further told Professor F. N. Petroff :

"By offering education to vast multitudes of your people who were kept imprisoned in the darkness of ignorance, millions of human beings who never got any chance to realise their humanity, and were obliged to yield to exploitation and oppression in order to preserve their precarious existence, you have made an invaluable contribution to human progress."

But the serious flaw, according to Tagore, was that Soviet Russia made "a mould of the system of education. Character cast in a mould never endures. If the law of man's dynamic mind clashes with the principle of his educational theory, then either the mould will be shattered to bits, or man's mind will be cramped and atrophied or, worse

still, be reduced to an automaton.”<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s idea was that “education should be a part of life itself, and must not be detached from it and be made into something abstract.” It was always his attempt to allow the children, brought to his school, to live a complete life, and to grant the utmost freedom. The sub-conscious mind of the child is more active than the conscious one. The most important thing is to surround children with all kinds of activities which could stimulate their minds and gradually arouse their interests.

The task of emancipation of people’s minds which have been shackled for ages was accepted by Tagore who believed that “all human problems find their fundamental solution in education.” He knew that all the evils from which India had been suffering was traceable to the utter lack of education of people. So his mission in life was to bear the torch of education, outside his own vocation as a poet. In extirpating all evils one is to go to the root, and that can only be done through education.

Tagore swerved away from the Soviet ideal, because he believed that “there must be disagreement where minds are allowed to be free. It would not only be an uninteresting but a sterile world of mechanical regularity if all of our opinions were forcibly made alike. Opinions are constantly changed and re-changed only through the free circulation of intellectual forces and moral persuasion. Violence begets violence and blind stupidity. Freedom of mind is needed for the reception of truth ; terror hopelessly kills it. The brute cannot subdue the brute. It is only the man who can do it.”<sup>2</sup> He intensely believed that “it is the mission of all great countries to complete their view of truth, not by merging their characteristics in those of another people, but by revealing their own personality. There can only be a co-ordination of truth, when the differences in

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s letter to his son, Mr. Rathindranath Tagore, in 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore’s comments on Soviet activities.

the human world are cultivated and respected.”<sup>1</sup> Tagore was not one of those who could find out “a single cause for all of our ills.” He admitted the existence of many causes “acting simultaneously, of intricate correlations and reduplicated actions and reactions.” In the words of Herbert Spencer, “there is no political alchemy by which you can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts.”

#### THE SANTINIKETAN SCHOOL

In an address to the school children and the teacher at the Victoria Theatre at Singapore in 1927, Tagore explained his ideals of education in a lucid manner. He stated what he had followed in his school at Santiniketan. In short, he explained the method and the system of training favoured by him.

First, Tagore favoured open-air classes. The deadness of the walls made everything gloomy and dull. The teacher must make his relationship with the boys natural and sympathetic. Discipline was not imposed upon them; they had the freedom of movement. When boys were tired, they could run about.

Secondly, boys are brought face to face with nature. Tagore believed that a moving mind had more power to assimilate facts, to gather knowledge from the outside world.

Thirdly, Tagore believed that the proper method of education would be to allow children to come to their paths of knowledge almost casually and suddenly, not through the narrow channel of examination which led to martyrdom imposed from without.

Fourthly, the whole surrounding must be made full of surprises for young boys, and through constant curiosity their minds would become more and more active.

Fifthly, “The best method of education for boys would

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's address to the Indian community in Japan, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, April 1925.



be to let them travel, and along with that have their lessons. Let them come to fresh facts in their lives. Let their schooling be like a perpetual picnic party, and let them have what they are daily accustomed to. Thus every day they would come upon new facts quite naturally, not through books, and along with that stream of experience. And it would be the duty of the boys to go all over India and while they travel, compare the different conditions and different races with one another and take notes ; and along with that have their mathematics, and other subjects."

Sixthly, it is the primary duty of boys to know properly and thoroughly the geography of the country to which they are born, not only the geography but every fact in connection with that country. The movement of the body is necessary for the alertness of mind which helps boys in accepting facts and truth.

Seventhly, the atmosphere is important. The various sides of culture are to be attended to. All creative activities must be encouraged—literary work, music, painting, carpentry, and smithy, gardening, poultry farming, agricultural farming. Boys must have the opportunity to watch all such work going on. The atmosphere of culture around boys is necessary, because "when we are young our sub-conscious mind is more active than our conscious mind, and this imbibes its life from the atmosphere." The atmosphere of creative human activities and the atmosphere of nature must be provided.

Eighthly, the atmosphere of love, universal sympathy ( both intellectual and emotional ) must be cultivated by boys. In the present-day education boys should understand should not be tainted and poisoned with the cultivation of prejudice and hatred for other races. This international understanding should be the basis of education.

Tagore observed : <sup>1</sup>

"I have made it my mission not merely to educate my students to know the facts of life and science, but also to train the attitude of their minds so that they may know the "One mind" above all. I do not for a moment say that they should lose their own national character. But this character should ever be seen in such a way as to realise that they are human beings. It is our endeavour to let our students fit themselves for the present age, in which the human races have come together. That is a great fact which has come within the experience of human beings, and its needs must have a great fulfilment in the history of man. . . . I shall utter to you the great prayer which has come from the heart of India :

He who is above all  
differences of colour,  
He who dispenses the innermost  
need of all passions,  
Let him unite our hearts  
in the bond of righteousness."

In the school at Santiniketan Tagore aimed at achieving the following :

( 1 ) Boys must realise their harmony with the all existence ; they must accept the invitation of nature, sunlight and air. They must know the earth by their touch, so they should avoid any foot-gear.

( 2 ) Boys must live not richly but in a simple manner, Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, Hence, expensive habits and ways of living should be avoided. Luxuries are burdens to boys.

( 3 ) To maintain the freshness of mind and keenness of sense, the school should not be a mere arrangement for giving lessons. It should be situated in the surroundings of a village where the freedom of primeval nature can be allowed to a boy. The ideal that in ancient India the school was there where was the life itself appealed most to Tagore who believed in the bringing up of students in the atmosphere of living aspiration.

<sup>1</sup> In a public lecture at Malacca in 1927.

( 4 ) There should be a living teacher who will help students in their lessons as a part of his life and not of his profession. To quote Tagore, "this ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind." The teacher should not be a mere vehicle of text-books ; the teaching must be made personal.

( 5 ) In the school administration boys must have their place ; in the matter of punishment they are not to be ignored.

( 6 ) They must cultivate the spirit of self-help, the power of self-control.

In Tagore's opinion, the school must be "an *asram* where men have gathered for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature ; where life is not merely meditative, but fully awake in its activities, where boys' minds are not being perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the self-idolatry of the nation is the truest ideal for them to accept, where they are bidden to realise man's world as God's kingdom to whose citizenship they have to aspire."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore started his school at Santiniketan in 1901 not in the pursuit of "any new theory of education" but "the memory of my school days." He found that "our regular type of school" (into one of which he was sent for his early education) "forcibly snatches away children from a world full of the mystery of God's own handiwork, full of the suggestiveness of personality. It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. It is a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results."<sup>2</sup> Tagore felt that life should not be treated as dead, to be cut into symmetrical conveniences, but that "the young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it."<sup>3</sup>

Tagore's ideal of education started from the basic conception that "we have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it." The highest education, as Tagore believed, was that which did not merely give us information but made our life in harmony with all existence. He found this education of sympathy ignored and repressed in our schools. He instinctively felt that no reform could lighten India's load "except the free and intensive dissemination of learning among the lower classes."

His educational reform ran principally on the following lines: (1) The University must be the nucleus of a living cell, should be the centre of the intellectual life of the people. It must not merely distribute "labelled packages of truth."

(2) Teachers must not be mere "purveyors of book-lore in whom the paper-god of the bookshops has been made vocal." A teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. "A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame." Teachers who have no living traffic with knowledge can only load the minds of students; they cannot quicken them.

(3) The educational institution must not be a dead cage "in which living minds are fed with food artificially prepared. It should be an open house, in which students and teachers are at one." They must live their complete life together, dominated by a common aspiration for truth and a need of sharing all the delights of culture.

(4) India must gratefully accept foreign culture, the modern science of Europe. But at the same time all the elements in our own culture have to be strengthened, "not to resist the Western culture, but truly to accept and assimilate it, to use it for our sustenance, not as our burden, to get mastery over the culture, and not to live on its outskirts as the hewers of texts and drawers of book-learning."

(5) In the centre of Indian learning we must provide for the co-ordinated study of all these different cultures—the

Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islamic, the Sikh and the Zoroastrian. The Chinese, the Japanese and the Tibetan will have to be added. "Those who have lost the harvest of their past have lost the present age."

(6) The great use of education is not merely to collect facts, but to know man and to make oneself known to man. It is the duty of every human being to master not only the language of intellect but also that personality which is the language of Art. The languages of lines and colours, sounds and movements are to be mastered. Thus the different systems of music and different schools of art which lie scattered in the different ages and provinces of India have to be brought together and studied.

(7) Education should not be dragged out of its native element, the life-current of the people. Educational institutions must have close association with the economic life. They must co-operate with the village round it, cultivate land, breed cattle, spin cloth, press oil from oil-seeds; they must produce all the necessities, devising the best means, using the best material and calling science to their aid. Their very existence should depend upon the success of their industrial activities carried out on the co-operative principle, which will unite teachers and students and villagers of the neighbourhood in a living and active bond of necessity. Our ancient *tapovanās* (forest schools) were not shut off from the daily life of the people.

(8) There should be common sharing of life with the tillers of the soil and the humble workers in the neighbouring villages. Students and teachers will study their crafts, invite them to the feasts, join them in the work of co-operation for communal welfare. In such an atmosphere students would learn to understand that humanity is the divine harp of many strings, waiting for its one grand music.

(9) Life in such a centre should be simple and clean. "Its aim should lie in imparting life-breath to the

complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom and final perfection,”

Tagore lamented that the system of folk education, which was indigenous to India, was dying out. “It flowed naturally through the social channels and made its way everywhere. It is a system of wide-spread irrigation of culture.” The mode of instruction included the recitation of the epics, the expounding of the scriptures, readings from the Puranas, performances of plays founded upon early myths and legends, dramatic narration of the lives of ancient heroes, and the singing in chorus of songs from the old religious literature. Thus the common people were made conscious of their own culture and the sanctity of social ideals, although they might be technically illiterate. But now-a-days we are casting about to borrow our educational plans from European institutions. “The trampled plants of Indian corn are dreaming of recouping their harvest from the neighbouring wheat-fields.”

The idea of non-co-operation, non-co-operation with education, did not appeal to Tagore. He found that the non-co-operation movement had at its back a fierce joy of annihilation, “which at its best is asceticism, and at its worst the orgy of frightfulness in which human nature, losing faith in the basic reality of normal life, finds a disinterested delight in an unmeaning devastation.”<sup>1</sup> He went further and said: “Non-co-operation in its passive moral form, is asceticism, and in its active moral form violence. The desert is as much a form of “himsa,” violence, as in the raging sea in storm; they are both against life.”<sup>2</sup> During the Swadeshi movement in Bengal Tagore could not and did not advise students to leave their schools and colleges, even at the cost of being

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, March 5, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

misunderstood, but he advised them to use swadeshi goods. He felt that "the great injury and injustice which had been done to those boys, who were tempted away from their career before any real provision was made, could never be made good to them." Tagore courted banter and ridicule from his countrymen, as he could not lend support to a mere negative programme. He, on the other hand, tried to stem the tide against Western education to our boys which was being boycotted in the name of the non-co-operation movement. In his talk on "*Shiksher Milan*" (Contact of Culture) he cast his verdict in favour of living and mobile Western education and learning. He believed in the true meeting of East and West, but the ideal of non-co-operation hurts that truth. To put it positively, Tagore believed in the law of co-operation. No one people of the earth can work out its salvation by detaching itself from the other. This is true not only in the moral plane of humanity but also in the material plane of civilisation. Even from material considerations it is hardly possible for any nation to live and prosper in isolation. Tagore therefore asked himself and replied to his own enquiry :

"To-day, at this critical moment of the world's history, cannot India rise above her limitations and offer the great ideal to the world that will work towards harmony and co-operation between the different peoples of the earth? Men of feeble faith will say that India requires to be strong and rich before she can raise her voice for the sake of the whole. But I refuse to believe it. That the measure of man's greatness is in his material resources is a gigantic illusion casting its shadow over the present day world—it is an insult to man. It lies in the power of the materially weak to save the world from this illusion; and India, in spite of her penury and humiliation, can afford to come to the rescue of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

The egoism of the Nation is to be destroyed. The spirit of rejection finds its support in the consciousness of separateness. Hence, Tagore thought that our attempt

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

to alienate our heart and mind from the West was nothing but spiritual suicide. But he was equally mindful of the mischief caused by the West. "The West has misunderstood the East. This is at the root of the disharmony that prevails between them." This is no less responsible for the tirade against the West. But it will be a calamity if India spurns the West. "India, in order to find herself, must give herself. But this power of giving can only be perfected when it is accompanied by the power of receiving. That which cannot give, but can only reject, is dead."

Tagore must not be confused with laying less emphasis on the development of Eastern mind. He was filled with joy when he found that "we have turned our face towards the East." He passionately believed that "when we have intellectual capital of our own, the commerce of thought with the outer world becomes natural and fully profitable." But "to say that such commerce is inherently wrong is to encourage the worst form of provincialism, productive of nothing but intellectual indigence." Tagore was, therefore, against Mahatma Gandhi's non-co-operation movement in 1921 in so far as it sought to reject the West. It was at that time the ideal of *Visva-Bharati* was taking on a more concrete shape in Tagore's mind. But "no one admired more than the Poet Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual appeal against brute force and his passionate devotion to the service of the poor."<sup>1</sup> Tagore was particularly grateful to Gandhiji for giving India the opportunity to prove that her faith in the divine spirit in man is alive "in spite of a great deal of materialism in our religions, as they are practised, and a spirit of exclusiveness in our social system."

In India the range of our lives is narrow and discontinuous. This is the reason why our minds are beset with provincialism. In Europe one feels "the flood-tide of life

<sup>1</sup> This is recorded by Mr. C. F. Andrews who got substantial evidence of the Poet's admiration of Mahatma Gandhi in the letters to him written by Tagore.



and companionship." It was, therefore, Tagore's intimate desire that at Santiniketan "we must have the widest possible outlook for our boys, and universal human interests. This must come spontaneously—not merely through the reading of books, but through dealings with the wider world."<sup>1</sup> Movement is the only cure when life becomes heavy with debris.

Tagore felt very keenly that India had been living in a narrow cage of petty interests. "We do not believe that we have wings, for we have lost sky; we chatter and hop and peck at one another within the small range of our obstructed opportunities." But he was convinced that "through the cracks and chinks of our walls we must send out our starved branches to the sunlight and air, and the roots of our life must pierce the upper strata of our soil of desert sands till they reach down to the spring of water which is exhaustless."<sup>2</sup> In spite of the cramped condition of our outward circumstances, he stood up to uphold the dignity of man through the founding of the school at Santiniketan. He announced that Indians were not doomed to be small for all time.

Tagore wanted to save Santiniketan from "the whirlwind of our dusty politics" because, in his opinion, Santiniketan belonged to the world. We shall make use of it for the inter-change of spiritual wealth. He, however, recognised that it was difficult for Indians to forget all the irritations, heaped upon them, that "keep our consciousness concentrated on our own daily annoyances," but "emancipation of consciousness is both the means and end of spiritual life."<sup>3</sup> Santiniketan must cater to the needs that belong to all mankind and to all time; it must give expression to the eternal man by fulfilling the prayer of ancient India, *asato má sad gamaya, tamaso má jyotir gamaya,*

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews on October 11, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, August 20, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, October 3, 1920.

*mrityor māmritam gamaya*, (Out of untruth lead me to truth, out of darkness lead me to light, out of death lead me to eternity). This was the dream of Tagore.

Tagore had special fascination for the rebellious nature of human mind. That was why he was attracted to the West—its restless search for the way out of stagnant existence. That explained why he had appreciated the surging tide of the Bengalee mind which moved forward as a result of the contact with the West. Tagore observed :<sup>1</sup>

“It has struck me again and again when I was in Japan. I felt that there was strong resemblance between the Bengalee and the Japanese. In this vast country of ours the Bengalee was first in the field to accept the new scheme of things evolving from the contact of India with the West. Even now there is the requisite softness in the Bengalee mind to accept and to evolve the new order. One of the reasons was that the Bengalee had the greatest amount of the mixing of blood. Moreover, Bengal was shut off from other parts of India for a long time. Under the influence of Buddhism or for other reasons, Bengal remained insulated, and it thus developed a narrow form of independence. The Bengalee mind was comparatively more free from bondage, and it was easier for the Bengalee to accept Western education. The initiation of our country in Western education was not full and unimpeded as it was in the case of Japan. Whatever we get from the miserly hand of the other, we cannot ask for more. If European education were fully accessible to us, the Bengalee would have without doubt mastered it completely. To-day education is becoming costly to us, still in the narrow gate of University Bengalees have jostled together. In fact, the chief reason of discontent that swept the province was the impeded move towards utilisation of Western education. The Bengalee mind flowed in full force towards anything Western ; we were ready to go near the Englishman—Bengalees were activated to overcome all traditions that stood in the way of such union. But the pride of Bengalees was hurt when they received no encouragement from the English. The present hatred of English education is the antithesis of his love for it. This reaction is the chief obstacle to the acceptance of modern education from the hands of the English. . . . Even this conflict is indicative of the moving nature of the Bengalee mind. But conflict is hardly creative. Conflict hurts true vision and mars real strength.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Tagore's *Japan-Yatri* (A Traveller in Japan).

Whatever grievances we may nurse within our hearts, we must not forget that the task of unlocking the gate of union of the East and the West will chiefly have to be shouldered by Bengalees. That was why that the first path-finder of this new era of Bengal was Ram-mohan Roy. He had shown no timidity in accepting the West in full, as he had unbounding regard for the East. The West which he saw was not the military West, not the mercantile West, but the West overflowing with life and knowledge."

### THE VISVA-BHARATI

Tagore believed that "in order to know Man one had to know men." Even the most primitive people have to be known. It was the privilege of man to acknowledge common humanity. The *Visva-Bharati* was started in 1921 to prove the superabundance of spiritual wealth of India to the rest of the world and through it to relate India to the other civilised countries. Tagore wanted to model his *Visva-Bharati* after the pattern of great universities of India in the past like Nalanda and Takshasila when pilgrims and students came to India to accept the gift. Tagore observed<sup>1</sup> :

"They (Indians of the past) sent out this cry of invitation to the world ; and we of the present day who are descended from them have the responsibility of that invitation which went forth in the past, the invitation to this great world of men to come to us and share the store of spiritual wisdom we have. It is for that purpose I have started the *Visva-Bharati*, to fulfil that responsibility to our ancestors and to fulfil the responsibility of the wealth received from them which can be done only by giving."

In the starting of *Visva-Bharati*, Tagore was basically influenced by two considerations :

1. "Human history was the history of the effort of man to create his own surroundings, to use the materials which God gave to them and to build something which was Godly, which was worth their doing and worth their living

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's address at Singapore on July 23, 1927.

for and dying for. . . . . Man, wherever he might be, if he produced something that was of eternal value, he could not claim it exclusively for himself or his own people, because it belonged, as their birthright as human beings, to every one. All the great literatures, works of art, religious preachings of great men, and their lives, were for every one of them.”<sup>1</sup>

2. We must accept the best that is in European civilisation—the great gift of science and the scientific attitude of mind ; we must accept the best culture from the West, never to forget that in return we shall have to offer something of our own. Merely living upon the charity of other races is not manly, nor is it dignified.

The misery and darkness of the Great War 1914-18 led Tagore, step by step, to form at Santiniketan a home of brotherhood and peace, “where East and West might meet in a common fellowship of study and work.” This was the beginning of his *Visva-Bharati* (House of Learning for all peoples and religions). He wanted the Santiniketan *Asram* to extend invitations to all who were lovers of peace and good will “to come together there, on equal terms, without distinction of caste or race or creed.” In this conception he was definitely influenced by the forest *Asrams* or religious retreats of ancient India. Tagore acknowledged it in one of his lectures :

“Our forefathers spread a single pure white carpet, whereon all the world was cordially invited to take its seat in amity and good fellowship. No quarrel could have arisen there ; for He in whose name the invitation went forth, for all time to come, was Santam, Sivam, Advaitam—the Peaceful, in the heart of all conflicts ; the Good, who is revealed through all losses and sufferings ; the One, in all diversities of creation. And in His name was this eternal truth declared in ancient India—“He alone sees truly who sees all beings as himself.”

Tagore explained his *Visva-Bharati* ideal in the course of several lectures in America in 1920. He felt that the

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's talk at Kuala Lumpur in 1927.

present age must pulsate with the urge for co-ordination and co-operation. He, therefore, felt the call for the adjustment of knowledge through comparative study and for the preparation of the field to co-ordinate all the cultures of the world, "where each will give to and take from the other; where each will have to be studied through the growth of its stages in history." But in order to co-operate truly with the cultures of the world India must base her structure on the synthesis of all her different cultures. Tagore had all love for foreign culture, because that was helpful for the vitality of our intellectual nature, but he was equally anxious that all the elements of Indian culture must be strengthened and appreciated so that "our gaze shall no longer be timid and dazed." The Poet's *Visva-Bharati* ideal was to "kindle on some common altar of the land a great sacrificial fire of intellect which may radiate sacred light in all directions." He wrote to Mr. C. F. Andrews in 1920 :

"There are chains which still keep our boat clinging to the sheltered cove of the past. We must leave it behind. Our loyalty must not be for any land of a limited geography. It should be for the nationality of the common idea, to which are born individuals belonging to various nations, who are carrying their gifts of sacrifice to the one great shrine of Humanity. Santiniketan must make accommodation for the workers from all parts of the world; it must make room for Man, even if the Nation obstructs his path."

Tagore had also this in his mind that both the Santiniketan school and the *Visva-Bharati* must be freed from the steam-roller of the Education Department; they must spring from our own life and be maintained by our own life; they should not be machine-made articles perfectly modelled in a workshop. To put it in the language of Tagore, "my bird must retain its freedom of wings and not be tamed into a sumptuous nonentity by any controlling agency outside its own living organism."<sup>1</sup> Tagore's "The Parrot's Training" (*Tota-Kahini*) is a great satire on

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's letter to Mr. C. F. Andrews, April 21, 1921.

mechanised education, to which the Indian child is a helpless victim. This conception militates against fashioning the School and the University after the patterns imposed by the regulations of Calcutta University to which they are now affiliated.

Love hungers for perfect knowledge. The first step in the context of human progress is to secure a true understanding of the real wealth that has been produced in this world and a true assessment of the objects which aim at the welfare of humanity. This can be achieved by shouldering the two-fold responsibilities, the responsibility of realising the ancestral wealth of your own culture and the responsibility of sharing it with the rest of the world. Tagore put it that "Visva-Bharati is India's invitation to the world, her offer of sacrifice to the highest truth of man."<sup>1</sup> And this can only be done when "our wealth is truly proved by our ability to give," and "Visva-Bharati is to prove this on behalf of India." In other words, "the aim of *Visva-Bharati* is to acknowledge the best ideal of the present age in the centre of her educational mission."<sup>2</sup> It demands a new education, which is to be established on the basis of "a wider relationship of humanity," and not on the basis of "the collective egoism of the Nation," generally cultivated in our schools. This new education will be the harbinger of that peace "which is the infinite atmosphere of truth." Tagore intensely believed that the time had come when humanity could be saved by the awakening of a new faith, broadbased on this new education. The motto of *Visva-Bharati* is: *Yatra visvam bhavaty ekanidam* (Where the whole world meets in one place).

Tagore's *Visva-Bharati* stood for certain ideals. The immediate aim was to strengthen the spiritual force of Asia and to make India alive to her own culture. Tagore

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's article on *Visva-Bharati*, *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, April 1923.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

believed that in order to facilitate free co-operation of civilisation and nations, each people, each civilisation must purify its creative ideals. The rhythm will suffer if there is abandonment of individuality, if man sheds his longing towards the universal sphere of harmony and bliss. He built up *Visva-Bharati* to widen the sphere of co-operation, to curb the spirit of contention and competition, to teach mankind to look beyond the interests of individual nations and to meet in mutual respect and goodwill. In the harmonious concert of the world no individual tune should be missing, but all the detached notes should be turned into music through rhythm. This was the ultimate goal of *Visva-Bharati* which was evolved by Tagore in the aftermath of the world war of 1914-18 so that the repetition of the disaster might be avoided. Tagore's approach was based on the recognition that there was the ultimate reality in every individual, in every nation, and that all human beings belonged to the higher Unity.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Arthur Koestler stated in his remarkable book, *The Yogi and the Commissar* :

"Contemplation survives only in the East, and to learn it we have to turn to the East ; but we need qualified interpreters and above all an interpretation in the terms and symbols of Western thought. . . . Neither the saint nor the revolutionary can save us : only the synthesis of the two. Whether we are capable of achieving it, I do not know. But if the answer is in the negative, there seems to be no reasonable hope of preventing the destruction of European civilisation, either by total war's successor Absolute War, or by Byzantine conquest—within the next few decades."

Tagore sought the synthesis of the saint and the revolutionary ; his appeal was to the creative forces in human nature and not to " the dark, unsatisfied and raging impulses of man " ; he believed that God in man was a reality. He was a competent interpreter of the spirit of Indian culture, and his interpretation bore the hall-mark of scientific outlook which the West believed in. He strove hard for the restoration of a healthy social structure, suffused with faith in human dignity, to the race of man. He discarded the morality of the ages of piracy ; he refused to bow to a system which sanctioned adventure, pride and power for leaders, and complete slavery for the rest in the hope of booty, for the satisfaction of pillaging and striking down those marked out as enemies.<sup>1</sup> Tagore accepted the simple truth that " all men are human, that no men are beasts " ; and he had abounding faith in humanity.

<sup>1</sup> The Revolutionary seeks to sustain and whet the emotion of a warrior in battle, to broadbase human activities on the hatred for the enemy, to fight for justice which is " the joyful elimination from the face of the earth of those who oppose us." The Totalitarian challenges the Liberal : " You offer them a whole world to love ; we give them a tangible minority to hate." Rex Warner in the novel, *The Professor*, discusses the ethos of the totalitarian mind in a revealing manner.



When Tagore lived and worked, the Indian nation was in "the hollow of the historical wave." During the inter-regnum Tagore built oases and assisted the birth of all progressive movements. To-day India seems to be in the upward surge of the historical wave; the time is ripe for a new jump. At this critical period in India's history, we cannot afford to see Tagore pigeon-holed in the archives of immobile Indian thought. He should be accepted, so that impatient revolutionaries may not spread consternation by the gnashing of their teeth and brandish the polluted knife at the social body, or that saints and workers dead to historical sense and historical forces may not envelop the path with the heaped-up rubbish and lead the country into the narrow pools of uncreative traditions. He laid the foundations of a correct approach, and it is for us to utilise them in our march to progress. It is only partially true that in the unfoldment of human history there is "the play of the contingent and unforeseen." But leaders who are the products of material conditions and the spirit of the times must appear on the stage to fashion "the cycle of the social organism." The response to the given social need is not the ultimate reality; the creation and the direction of social forces in the interests of higher synthesis are the tasks of leaders. There is always the choice of alternatives, and Tagore will keep us alive and tied to the right choice.

It is true that Tagore asked us to realise that he had but one introduction to the world, the introduction of a poet and nothing else. He laid no claim to lead men to their destination; his part was to walk with the wayfarer. "Those who want to place me on a high pedestal, with the ringing of bells and the sounding of conchshells, to them I would say that I have been born in a lower rung; the master of games has given me leave to withdraw from the seats of the wise and mighty. I have poured out my heart into the dust of the earth. I am the friend of all who are near to the lap of the earth, who live and have their being on the soil, who take their first steps on the earth and find

their final rest in her bosom. I am a poet and nothing else.”<sup>1</sup> But as a poet he wanted to give shape to man’s innate desire of self-expression, and through the media of diverse activities and writings Tagore tried to serve humanity by the removal of impediments to, and the creation of facilities for, fuller expression and better understanding. There he was the torch-bearer, the poet of man and the prophet of humanity. The best form of social action is to liberate the powers of man and to engage them in activities that enlarge the meaning and the bounds of life. This social impulse was the sheet-anchor of Tagore, and it led him to adumbrate that freedom is “the truth of necessity,” the necessity of accepting and discharging obligations cheerfully. It was the foresight of the future that kept Tagore living in the midst of dirt and filth.

The uniqueness of man and of human society is to be frankly recognised. Man is the only organism normally and inevitably subject to “psychological conflict.” The unique characteristics of man which may better be called psychological and social than narrowly biological spring from one or other of three characteristics<sup>2</sup>: (1) his capacity for abstract and general thought; (2) the relative unification of his mental processes, as against the much more rigid compartmentalisation of animal mind and behaviour; (3) the existence of social units, such as tribe, nation, party and church, with a continuity of their own, based on organised tradition and culture. Man must, therefore, face the consequences of his uniqueness. “By means of his conscious reason and its chief offspring, science, man has the power of substituting less dilatory, less wasteful, and less cruel methods of effective progressive change than those of natural selection, which alone are available to lower organisms.” Tagore has all along harped on the uniqueness of man and asked him to be proud of his superiority.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s speech at Santiniketan on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. Its English translation appears in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Vol. X. Part I.

<sup>2</sup> *The Uniqueness of Man* by Dr. Julian Huxley, p. 27.

His conscious purpose and his sense of values will lead man to the establishment of newer and higher standards for change than those of mere survival and adaptation to immediate circumstances. This higher synthesis was all along aimed at by Tagore. Man has the competence in guiding and fashioning the course of progress according to a deliberate aim, but human mind and personality cannot be fully understood in the perspective of biology alone ; because the human type of mind is distinguished by the capacity for abstraction and the capacity for synthesis. Tagore's analysis was based on the acceptance of the attributes of human mind. He accepted the position that the human spirit had many sides and could not be guided by any single rule, that it was false to give absolute predominance to any one aspect of life, and that the human mind could not be restrained from making new discoveries in the adventure of its evolution. He recognised the difference between human and biological affairs. Man through his powers of mind has reached a new stage, not open to lower organisms. Dr. Julian Huxley rightly observes that " man has entered a realm where things and experiences can have a supreme value in themselves even without subserving any purely biological needs." Tagore has, therefore, aspired after new levels of achievement and experience, far removed from the satisfaction of biological needs. That is the evolutionary destiny of mankind. That is the humanist scheme of things.

Tagore believed in life as a whole, and as such in diversity which should be the basis of collective achievement. He believed in the emergence of human personality, but with equal force he proclaimed that society provided the machinery for the development of individuals. He found that life could be worth living for. He accepted science ; he welcomed culture ; he knew that commerce between mind and matter would give the completeness of life. He stood for a self-conscious society. In the framework of a living society, every individual should know his

role in the collective knowledge and will and the aims of social existence. There can be no free country without a self-conscious society. Hence, his emphasis was placed on the growth of social consciousness. In the analysis of Tagore, political freedom is undoubtedly an essential condition, but freedom can only be maintained by a self-conscious society, not by voiceless millions who are slaves of custom and fate.

### THE HISTORICAL APPROACH

Dialectical development<sup>1</sup> in history was accepted by Tagore. But in human history the general law of motion does not inevitably result in higher synthesis and progressive evolution. It is recognised that the casual inter-connection of the progressive movement from the lower to the higher asserts itself through "zig-zag movements and temporary set-backs." In the case of higher synthesis conscious effort or direction is necessary. The objective social forces and the inner contradictions, unless wisely and properly led, will lead to set-backs and reversals where the nation may stagnate for a definite period. Here the question of leadership and social consciousness arises. Human minds are so varied, rich and different and human society so vulnerable to quick changes that in order to achieve higher synthesis wise leadership is of constructive importance. Rational approach to social problems, perfect understanding of the objective conditions, true assessment of social forces and inner contradictions, elasticity of mind to discard fixed truths but to accept forces which are latent, hidden and dormant—these are the requirements of leaders, especially at the nodal point in history, when a jerk or a jump is necessary. Tagore believed in the growth of personality and the advent of leaders to impart wise

<sup>1</sup> "The existence of two mutually contradictory aspects, their conflict and their flowing together into a new category, comprises the essence of the dialectical movement."—Karl Marx.

guidance to a decisive change in the period of transition. Bad leadership can throw the country back. That is why we deplore bad and inefficient direction in history ; that is why we should keep ourselves active, conscious and vigilant to create forces for wise leadership. For all this Tagore is extremely helpful, and as such he is a true path-finder. Unfortunately, he is little understood in the context of our national reconstruction.

Tagore's vision of history was based on the fundamental basis that "senility becomes apparent when the mind cannot create new ideas, or have the courage and faith to believe in its own ideal world, when individuals merely repeat mechanical movements endlessly, and the habits of life become fixed." This is sure to happen "when utility occupies the principal place in our endeavours." The history of India, as Tagore observed, "has been the history of the struggle between the constructive spirit of the machine, which seeks the cadence of order and conformity in social organisation, and the creative spirit of man, which seeks freedom and love for its self-expression."<sup>1</sup> The tragedy is that to-day, the constructive spirit which offers its service and hospitality to life (through which its system can be vitalised) and the creative spirit of man are not living. India has, therefore, lost her "depth of philosophy and breadth of humanity," and she has fixed their ideals "in a permanent rigidity." The result has been "our huge medley of customs, ceremonials and creeds."

Tagore was, however, careful to point out that "it would be wrong for us, when we judge the historical career of India, to put all the stress upon the accumulated heap of refuse, gross and grotesque, that has not yet been assimilated in one consistent cultural body. Our great hope lies there, where we realise that something positively

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's essay on *A Vision of India's History*, *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, April 1923.

precious in our achievements still persists, in spite of circumstances that are inclement." He loved India, not because he had the chance to be born in her soil, but because "India truly seeks not a peace which is in negation, or in some mechanical adjustment, but that which is in *Sivam*, in goodness; which is in *Advaitam*, in the truth of perfect union; that India does not enjoin her children to cease from *karma*, but to perform *karma* in the presence of the Eternal, win the pure knowledge of the spiritual meaning of existence."<sup>1</sup> The following is the true prayer of Mother India:

"Ya eko-varno bahudhá Saktiyogát  
Varnán anekán nihitártho dadhāti  
Vichaiti chānte Visvamádau  
Sa no buddhyá Subhayá samyunaktu"

(He who is one, who is above all colour distinctions, who dispenses the inherent needs of men of all colours, who comprehends all things from their beginning to the end, let Him unite us to one another with the wisdom which is the wisdom of goodness).

India may be mocked at by the mighty people who hold their sway over the present-day world, but she cannot and will not believe that the supreme end of civilisation lies in the competition of intemperate power with power. The world has a deeper meaning. Tagore persisted in his faith in the infinite of the human spirit, in the creative and co-operative principle of civilisation. He believed with Benedetto Croce that "the past must be faced not to speak in metaphors, it must be reduced to a mental problem which can find its solution in a proposition of truth, the ideal premise for our new activity and our new life."

Indian civilisation is all-varied in mutual obligation. All classes in the East are bound not by contract, but by the inner living bond of unity. Accordingly, the form of Government is not important; it is the form of social organisation in which India is interested. We in India are more interested in personality than in power. Her whole

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

civilisation proclaims the triumph of the human. It can hardly be trifled with. "Great periods of history are periods of eruption, unlooked for seemingly against the times, but they have all along been cradled in the dark chamber of the people's inner nature." Tagore urged us often not to ignore the genius of the race which is the centre of the universe of reality. But in laying emphasis on the spirit of the East, he never asked us to disable ourselves from receiving the truth proclaimed by the West. The culture, the humanity of the West, belong not to the Western nations but to People ; we must try to make them our own "in order to impart to our life a movement and to our ideals a vitality that shall give them the impulse to produce new flower and fruit." The truths offered by the West are particularly the scientific outlook, their keen intellect and indomitable will in the service of human welfare, their active love of humanity and their wide human interest.

But the meeting of the East and the West has been unfortunate, because "when the West came to our door, the whole of Asia was asleep, the darkness of night had fallen over her life. Her lights were dim, her voice mute. She had stored up in her vaults her pressure, no longer growing. She was not producing living thoughts or fresh forms of beauty. She was not moving forward but endlessly revolving round her past. She was not ready to receive the West in all her majesty of soul."<sup>1</sup> The weakness in Asia allowed the West to thrust itself upon us in the role of an utilitarian adventurer, imbued with the idolatry of the Nation and carrying "an elaborate paraphernalia of self worship." The East lay humbled and humiliated by the vindictive self-assertion and physical dominance of the West ; where dealings are restricted to the material plane, the touch of the complete truth is lost. Men are not mere gold-diggers and slave-drivers ; that is not the whole truth.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's *Judgment*, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* in October 1925.

“The view that we can get of her (West), in our mutual dealings, is that of a titanic power with an endless curiosity to analyse and know, but without sympathy to understand ; with numberless arms to coerce and acquire, but no serenity of soul to realise and enjoy.”

What is known as Indian civilisation is the product of synthesis. The Vedic civilisation is the product of Aryan culture and thought that flourished in India ; the main six systems of Indian philosophy, viz., Mimansa, Nyaya, Vaisesik, Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta, are all the offshoots of Aryan thought. It is not true to say that Aryan thought was highly metaphysical and speculative and had no emphasis on “objective reality.”<sup>1</sup> The Samkhya system laid stress on *Prakriti* (by which it explained the phenomenal world without reference to God) ; the Vaisesik system was an analysis of the external world ; the Nyaya system explained man’s inner working through a system of logical reasoning. But Hindu civilisation was influenced by Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Saktism—all coming from non-Brahmin influences. Aryans came into conflict with children of the soil in India. Aryan quest of knowledge became fused with non-Aryan devotionism and emotionalism, and this synthesis was the basis of Indian civilisation. The history of India provides the synthesis of contrary and contradictory forces. The virility and mobility of Hindu civilisation could be proved by remarkable adjustments and adaptations worked out by Aryans.<sup>2</sup> Aryans could absorb and synthetise non-Aryan culture, and even the Sakas (Scythians) and Yavanas (Greeks) on and from the advent of Maurya Power. The Aryan social

<sup>1</sup> For a stimulating study of Indian materialism vis-a-vis Marxian materialism, Prof. B. N. Das Gupta’s *Materialism, Marxism, Determinism and Dialectics* may be usefully referred to.

<sup>2</sup> The Indus Valley civilisation or Mahenjo-daro civilisation was built up by a pre-Aryan race in Indian soil. Very little is known if Mahenjo-daro civilisation affected the Aryan culture and thought that developed later in India. The Indus Valley people were probably invaders, establishing a highly developed civilisation in the third millennium B.C.



structure lost mobility and virility when Brahminical ascendancy was established after the flood-tide of Buddhism had ebbed away in India. The exact date could not be fixed. Tagore, accordingly, suggested that during the regime of the Imperial Guptas, Brahminical society was re-asserted and established. That was a stage when Buddhism had swept away Aryan *varnasram* to a considerable extent, and foreigners were seeking recognition in society. It was thought advisable, as a strategy of self-preservation, to revive Aryan thought and society on narrow, exclusive lines. The points of contact were not stressed, and the phases of differences were shown up. That was the beginning of the rigid ossification of Aryan rules of conduct.

Buddhism may be said to be first bold challenge to the ascendancy of Brahminical civilisation. The Vedic Samhitas<sup>1</sup> rolled on into Upanishadic mysticism, speculation and metaphysics—which proclaimed the superiority of Brahminical intellect. This Aryan spell was broken by Buddhism which pointed to the inner virtues of man, cast aside the external shell or rites and ceremonies, emphasised social activity, introduced no formal worship but normal duty, and shifted the focus of duty from deity to man. Early Buddhism held aloof from speculation and metaphysics, but it was through the wonderful accommodating virtues of Brahminical India that “Buddhism passed away by becoming blended with Hinduism.” Buddha was proclaimed as an *avatar* of Vishnu; Buddhism developed later on metaphysical speculation which was the peculiar trait of Aryan mind. Aryan intellect first tried to stem the tide of Buddhism by the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita which proclaimed household life, based on the bhakti cult.

<sup>1</sup> The Vedas represent teachings suitable to four stages of life—the Samhitas for the student, the Brahmanas for the householder, the Aranyakas for the retiring men, and the Upanishads for the stage of Sanyasa (ascetic life). Hence, the Upanishads are known as Vedanta (the last part of the Vedas). The Vedic period may be stated to be from 1500 to 600 B.C.

Bhagavatism may be said to be the fusion of Aryan and Dravidian culture. We find Isvara Krishna remodelling the philosophy of Samkhya rejecting mysticism. On the one hand, Brahminical India was trying for a new philosophy to block the surging tide of Buddhism ; on the other hand, Brahmins were forging chains for Sudras and non-Brahmins so that Brahminical ascendancy might not be impaired. Kautilya (fourth century B.C.) showed bitter attitude against Sudras, although his own king was a Sudra ; Manu-Smriti (150-120 B.C.) was a black document of class warfare seeking to maintain Brahminical superiority ; Jagnavalkya-Smriti and Vishnu-Smriti had no liberal approach. It was in the period of the Imperial Guptas that "Brahminical arrogance reached climax." It was an interesting fact that Buddhist Kings, such as Asoka, Kanishka, and Harshavardhan<sup>1</sup> showed no spirit of vengeance against Brahminical supremacy, but Brahmins all along, particularly during the regime of Hindu kings, sharpened their knives to dissect and pulverise social cohesiveness with a view to stabilising their rule. It is argued that all this was prompted by the instinct of preservation. May be, but this return to the shell-life forbidding free intercourse within and without and establishing Brahminical superiority and the rules of conduct and life with the sanction of priesthood was the most tragic event in Indian history. It is thus found when the cementing influence of Buddhism died away and was swallowed up by Hinduism, Brahminical supremacy with all reactionary forces was established. That was an age when Sudras, Sakas, Huns, and non-Brahminical and non-Indian sects were working out higher synthesis in their own way. Brahminical India was disturbed : it laid down rigid rules for observance. Buddhist Kings were not vindictive and arrogant in crushing Brahminism ; if they were so, India would have been the battle-field of warring

<sup>1</sup> Officially professing Saivism but strongly inclined towards Buddhism.

religions and beliefs. She was spared that agony, perhaps she suffered for all this in the course of her historical development. The renaissance of Hinduism in the age of the Imperial Guptas could lead to no period of reformation, as the strategy lay not in achieving higher synthesis but in canalising traditions and practices of people into the approved fold congenial to the triumph of Brahminical ascendancy at the cost of the other non-Brahminical forces which sought to broaden visions and horizons. Varnasram-dharma was resurrected with a view to atrophying the process of expansion. The effort to reduce diversity to identity was carried too far.

If the spirit of Hindu Law is to be discussed, we find that the source of state-craft or of positive law is not the Vedas. Politics and positive law were not integral parts of the Dharmasastra; they are codified expressions of established and recognised usage. "The theory of ancient Hindu Jurists is clear. In the domain of positive law, dealing with the worldly ends and purposes of men, the Vedic religious principles, which are supra-sensible and extra-mundane, can have no scope."<sup>1</sup> The positive law that we find in the eighth and ninth chapters of Manu or in the second book of Yajñavalkya is fundamentally the same as in the Dharmasthira section of Kautilya.<sup>2</sup> It is only later in history that "Dharmasastra made law and politics its own, and Arthasastra gradually ceased to be studied and developed as a separate science." This was the resultant of Brahminical ascendancy which wilfully confused Dharmasastra with *Rajdharma* (State-craft) and *Vyavahara* (positive law) leading to the stagnation of social dynamics. It is an extremely significant fact that Brahminical Hinduism, however careful it may be to stabilise Hindu hegemony, never introduced persecution for the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Atul Chandra Gupta's article on *The Spirit of Hindu Law* in the Calcutta Law Journal, Vols. XLII and XLIII.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

mere crime of holding a different religious opinion. Religious persecution came to disgrace Indian soil after Muslim invasion. Hindus and Buddhists used methods of argument and persuasion ; Mahammadanism introduced the Inquisition, religious wars. With Moslems God was the Commander-in-Chief.

India is ridiculed as a land of rites and ceremonials ; it is a land of yogis and saints. This generalisation contains truth ; it has obvious demerits. Religious enlightenment is for the few ; rituals are for the masses. This conception is fundamental in Indian philosophy. The very fact that religion and religious rites have a great hold on the Indian people is discouraging for the emergence of dictatorial politicians, imbued with totalitarian ideologies. Political dictatorship demands absolute loyalty ; that is why all political dictators attack religion. Religion is an anathema to the dictator who expects parochial nationalism, and frenzied and undivided loyalty to him. That is why Indian soil is not congenial for political dictators ; but that is equally the reason why often imposters in the name of religion may exercise reactionary influences in society. Tagore has fought against the extension of the hold of irrational religious practices on human mind, but at the same time he has proclaimed the individual's right to universality which attacks the core of political dictatorship. The political dictator thinks in terms of class and nation, tribal spirit and local sentiment. He wanted humanity to come out of this shell-existence to breathe in the free air of righteous conduct without the overpowering influence of irrational devotion to any dictator, religious, political or otherwise. True religion is world loyalty ; that was the essence of Tagore's message. Universality is the antithesis of idolatrous psychology which is unhealthy for social progress. That which makes for separateness is evil. Dictatorship, in any form, thrives on separateness.

Tagore's anti-State attitude arose from the conviction that good things imposed from the above, unless they are

the fulfilment of the people's will, contribute little to the improvement of the nation, to the growth of the dynamic will that breaks the spell of stagnation. He found Indian people passive, society stagnant and reactionary. If this sterile and depressed state of things is to be removed, the first thing essential is that leadership must come from people. Foreign rulers cannot successfully wrestle with the problems and the conflicts of reactionary and decadent classes in society. Those who rule India are not our leaders, and our leaders have no chance to be our rulers. Tagore knew that salvation lay in the fact that we must be led and ruled by our leaders, so that the awakening of the masses of men for movement and change might be effective. A foreign Government cannot touch "the keys of emotion" which might release the needed creative and imaginative forces in society, washing away sterility, decadence and stagnation. It requires an assault upon traditions; there is need for magnetising the whole people with new enthusiasm and the acceptance of the new scheme of things. The incentive to constructive national reconstruction can only be supplied by our leaders having intimate touch with people. Accordingly, a scheme of things should be set up where our leaders get facilities to lead our people so that reforms may be effective and the minds of people are awakened to the new values. All this cannot be done by foreign rulers. The manner of life, the ways of thinking, the methods of living, the mode of earning, the fight with social abuses, the war on traditional institutions,—all these problems are complicated, and they cannot be successfully reformed unless our own leaders take them up and intoxicate the people with new ideas and new ways of life. The passivity is to go, and it can go when our leaders lead our people. This led Tagore to look to our own people, to rejuvenate our society and to create our leaders for communion with people, in scorn of the foreigners controlling the apparatus of the State. This was the basis of Tagore's anti-State attitude. He was critical of the

devastating effects of British rule on social and economic institutions. It was staggering for him to find that British rule aggravated the poverty, ignorance and physical miseries of people.<sup>1</sup> The way out is the elimination of foreign rule and the reconstruction of the country by the thinkers and workers of India, maintaining living touch with and regard for their own creative cultures and traditions. In the ultimate analysis, it is the national character that determines the nature of progress, and accordingly, all efforts are bound to run to waste unless our social and economic institutions become living, modern and cohesive. Tagore wanted to re-create and to rejuvenate her social and economic patterns so that the road to freedom might be broadened and the ghastly exploitation by the State prevented. He was not indifferent to the role of the State in the building up of national character and cohesiveness; he merely stressed on the acceptance of the inevitable fact in history that without living, alert and creative members of society, the State was bound to degenerate into a caucus of aspiring and ambitious persons, plotting their way into eminence on the slavish obedience of the people.

Tagore's emphasis on society does not spring from the theory of "non-State"; it is tantamount to anti-State attitude; that is, it likes to put an embargo on the extension of State's activities in every sphere of life. The non-State theory was never accepted by Hindus; they accepted

<sup>1</sup> Mr. H. N. Brailsford recorded the following verdict on the results of British rule in India: "Through a century the English conquerors took upon their own shoulders the responsibility for governing this population. They dwelt amid its poverty, its ignorance, its physical misery and its helplessness, and never dreamed of using the immense resources of the efficient machinery of Government which they had created to teach it, to heal it, to organise it out of its backwardness and inertia. They aggravated the pressure on the soil by hurrying the destruction of handicraft, and postponing the growth of industry. By suppressing until our own day, all political initiative among the governed, they lamed its will and checked the working of its powers of adaptation; they violently changed its economic environment, yet they held in check the forces in Indian society that would have reacted to the new conditions and remodelled its structure."—Subject India, p. 168.

decentralisation of powers and stood for a powerful social organisation. This was what Tagore proclaimed in his analysis that India belonged to the anti-State category. The non-State is a state of nature which is nothing but a state of the right of might. The "law of beasts" was never accepted by Hindus. The Hindu theory of *Matsya Nyaya* (the logic of the fish) is based on the knowledge that the strong would devour the weak like fish in water, so there is need of punishment and protection. The non-State is identified with "the negation of morals and manners, the nullification of property, the very antithesis of law and justice." The basic concepts of the Hindu theory of the State are *mamatva* (property) and *dharma*, and the doctrine of *danda* (punishment or restraint) flows from the basic philosophy of sovereignty. Hindu thinkers knew it perfectly that people were prone to interfering with the rights of others and violating morals and manners, so they should be checked, controlled and restrained. This is the rationale of coercive organisation, and the task was divided between the State and Society. Tagore believed that it was society which was the moraliser, the purifier and the civilising agent. He did not deny that Hindu political thinkers considered the State to be an institution necessary to the human race, if it was not to grovel in the condition of *matsya-nyaya*, but he preached the profundity of social existence, because in India *dharma-sutras* would have greater sanctity than statute-books or edicts of Kings. Thus, society became a duty-enforcing institution.

It is argued that the influences radiating from a common centre in all spheres of human activities and the regulation of human efforts from the central organisation cannot be successfully accomplished before "the era of steam and the industrial revolution." To put it in another way, "it is this fundamental influence of physics on politics that, more than any other single cause, forced the ancient and mediaeval empires of the world to remain but bundles

of States ”<sup>1</sup> ; it is the presence of physical barriers that help the doctrine of decentralisation of powers. It is true that the development of a highly centralised State is not possible before the era of steam, but Hindu thinkers and Tagore were alert on the need of beneficent agencies in social life, so that commonweal could not suffer owing to the abuse of power.

In the race for progress Indians are at a handicap. It is true that “in the sky of India broke the first dawn of knowledge,” but the *sanatan* burden is keeping them back. They are filled to the brim and loaded to the breaking point with the rubbish of the past. We are much behind in the race. “We are wholly and solely householders ; that is to say, we have been reduced to mere appurtenances of our household, held down to it with a thousand burdens. With the burden of our livelihood has become intertwined the burden of our social observance. So clogged and hampered are we with the compulsion of unmeaning rites, that our more important duties become impossible of proper fulfilment, our strength is so exhausted by our social ceremonials—from birth ceremony, through the whole series, to death ceremony—exerting their way over both this world and the next, that we are bereft of the energy to take any step forward ; what wonder that the children born and bred in this atmosphere should be defeated at every turn by the others.”<sup>2</sup> There we stand with back-bones bent under the accumulating burden of the past. Tagore asked his countrymen to come out of the shell of *sanatan* rubbish, without disrupting the best and the living ideals of ancient India.

Tagore wanted three things for the progress of India and of humanity : (1) Indian culture must discover itself ; (2) Western culture must be assimilated ; (3) every

<sup>1</sup> Prof. B. K. Sarkar's approach in *The Hindu view of Life* (1919), *The Futurism of Young Asia* (1922) and *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* (1926) is interesting to students of political science and sociology.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's Letters from Java.



nation must learn to respect the innate rights of every other nation. So he observed :

“ When the streams of ideals that flow from the East and from the West mingle their murmur in some profound harmony of meaning, it delights my soul. I feel proud whenever I find that the truth which dwells in the best thoughts of India has also been uttered in a different language, in a different part of the world. The best in the world have their fundamental agreement, because they are pure in truth. And therefore, it is their function to unite, and dissuade the small from bristling up like prickly shrubs, in the pride of the minute points of their differences, only to burst one another.”

Tagore, however, declared with supreme confidence :

“ We dead must wake up and emerge out of the meshes of fear and heaped-up abuses of life—must awake at this hour of glorious dawn to take up our appointed place in the midst of the wide awake world.

We must boldly declare—oh ye Gods that inhabit the earth, alike with you we are sons of the Immortal one.”

In modern geography, man is to be regarded as the central subject. “ The relationship between man and his environment is primarily due to man’s motivating force, his activities being moulded by, not produced by, nature.”<sup>1</sup> The natural environment is passive, its possibilities are concealed. Man is the active element, and it is for him “ to discover and capitalise these possibilities.” But there is a “ constant give-and-take struggle, a constant yielding and advancing ” between man and his environments. Men’s projects, choices, aspirations are often limited by the physical framework they live in. As man is the active agent, similar environments are not similarly utilised. The use differs “ according to culture.” “ Peoples in different culture stages probably will not react similarly to the same environmental complex.” In other words, the criterion of progress is the control of environment by organised society. And the nature of control is dependent on the level of cultural development of men inhabiting particular regions. As mankind is “ a veritable geographic factor,” the racial

<sup>1</sup> *Man’s Adoption of Nature* By P. W. Bryan, p. 368.

or ethnical make-up of organised society is to be taken note of. It is said that mankind is divided into three basal stocks, the Negroid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid.<sup>1</sup> There are of course several sub-stocks which may be termed races. In the Negroid division lie the Negroes and Bantus of Africa, the Bushman-Hottentot group in South Africa, the Melanesians of Oceania, and the Pygmies. In the Mongoloid division are the Sino-Japanese, the Hyper-borean Mongoloids, the Oceanic Mongoloids, and the Amer-Indians. Within the Caucasoid grouping may be found the Nordics of North Europe, the Alpines of Central Europe and the Asiatic highlands, the Mediterraneans of South Europe, North Africa and the Levant, and the Hindus of India. It is to be acknowledged that races play a part, sometimes even an important part, in human geography.<sup>2</sup> The point is—how and to what extent. Huntington is of the view that “for good or ill, each race has acquired certain characteristics.” They may be modified, but they can never be wholly destroyed. The different races cannot be made alike either by the influence of physical environment or by education and training.

In this view, man is to be explained in part by nature, but much more by nurture and racial characteristics. Along with the advance in social development, environment loses its hold, as natural environments can be changed partly. “In advanced societies, the mode of life often reflects earth conditions only slightly. Here the social environment appears to exert a more potent influence than the natural environment.”<sup>3</sup> Culture, race, and national character are undoubtedly influenced by “the physical milieu,” but man and his activities and the results of his activities are not similar in similar environments. “The essential wholeness of the geographical outlook would

<sup>1</sup> *Geography* By C. L. White and G. T. Renner, p. 750.

<sup>2</sup> *Human Geography* By Jean Brunhes.

<sup>3</sup> *Geography* By C. L. White and G. T. Renner, p. 756.

appear to be most satisfyingly brought out by taking man, as the highest form of life and the highest expression of the circulation or hydrosphere, in relation to his physical environment, as the central objective on which to lay our chief emphasis, with the other features of the hydrosphere fitting into their due places."<sup>1</sup> It is therefore relevant to know man's blood (the essence of animal life), man's culture and the social development of the group, if the course of man's activities is to be analysed and assessed. Activity and relationship—these are the two governing principles of human geography.

If we take the racial ethnology of India, we find that the Australoid type is one of the major elements in the aboriginal population of India. The whole of the Central and Southern Indian tribes belong essentially to the Proto-Australoids, although they belong to different linguistic families. The same can be said of the tribes of Western India and the partially reclaimed groups in the Gangetic Valleys. The Bhils, Kols, Badagas, Korwa, Kharwar, Munda, Bhumij and Malpaharias living in the Central Indian highlands and the Chenchus, Kurumbas, Malayans and Yeruvas of South India may be regarded as representatives of the Australoid type. India may be divided into several ethnic zones, although no rigid division is possible in many cases. "Broadly speaking a zone of Proto-Nordics<sup>2</sup> mixed with the Mediterranean and the Oriental<sup>3</sup> in North-Western India can be distinguished from a Peninsular Indian one containing an older and more primitive Dolichocephalic strain.<sup>4</sup> On both sides of this is to be

<sup>1</sup> *Man's Adaptation of Nature* By P. W. Bryan, p. 10. -

<sup>2</sup> Vedic Aryans. They are partially blond. In the hot climate of the Indian plains the blonds were eliminated by natural selection. The people of Northern Europe are essentially "blond."

<sup>3</sup> In the North-West there is an intruding element called "Oriental" by Eugen Fischer. The "Oriental" strain is dominant in the Pathan country, and in the plains of India it is felt in the Punjab.

<sup>4</sup> This is the type of Southern and a large component of the lower section of the population of Northern India.

found the Plano-Occipital Brachycephalic race mixed with the types mentioned above. The Mongoloids<sup>1</sup> occupy chiefly the sub-mountain regions in the North and the East, while the dark aboriginal tribes are scattered all over the Peninsular highlands, and many parts of the Upper Indian plains."<sup>2</sup> The contribution of each race to the formation of the various types can hardly be known with precision. But the Mongoloid strain is evidently strong in East Bengal and Assam.

True history is the history of mankind. The purpose of history is to find out the perfect kind of life. It is not merely "the conceiving, the remembering and the understanding of what has happened." "Men make their own history, but not just as they please," wrote Marx. History is the activity of man in pursuit of his ends. These ends are to be understood. Do men work towards definite ends with conscious intent? Engels points out that "despite the consciously willed ends of individuals, chance seems to rule. Only seldom does that occur which is willed. In most cases, the numerous ends which are willed conflict with or cut across one another, or they are doomed from the very outset to be unattainable, or the means to carry them out are insufficient. And so, out of the conflicts of innumerable individual wills and acts there arises in the social world a situation which is quite analogous to that in the unconscious, natural one. The ends of action are willed; but the results, which really flow from those actions, are not willed, or, in so far as the results seem to agree with the willed ends, ultimately they turn out to be quite other than the desired consequence." The Marxist also agrees that physical nature does not exert direct effect

<sup>1</sup> The Mongoloid races that affected the population of the Himalayan region, Assam and the lands adjoining the Eastern Frontiers and Burma are of the Tibetan strain. It is doubtful if the entire Bengali-speaking population is ethnically one unit, as there is considerable over-lapping of types. It is said that the Brachycephalic non-Mongoloid races are also strong in Bengal.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. B. C. Guha's article on *An Outline of the Racial Ethnology of India*.

upon world history. "In Marxist thought nature is never the pure nature of Physical Geography. It is closer to the nature of Human Geography."

Civilisation gathers peculiarities from time factor, from natural environment and from the human agency through which it is nourished. Every period in history has obvious peculiar traits; every natural geography imparts its own impress, and every race seeks to move in a particular way, influenced by environments and material conditions of living. Dwelling on the peculiarities of Bengal's culture Tagore observed as follows<sup>2</sup>:

"Bengal is built up of alluvial soil. Land is fertile here. The seeds sown fructify easily. Life-force has a special claim in this tract. Soil is not hard because of its alluvial character. Hence, ancient temples, palaces do not survive here; they sink down slowly and steadily. That is why places of pilgrimage are few in Bengal; the glory of the ancient is very little here. Through the grace of Providence Bengal is free from the trammels of the past. But God has thrown greater responsibilities of self-realisation on Bengal. The sterile burden of the past does not count in Bengal, but the claims of life are met in full here. . . . Bengal responds more easily to the claims of humanity under the influence of *elan vital*. The demands of life are most insistent in this mobile region. It will not be to our good if we harden and burden Bengal's *sadhana* with the suffocating mortar of the past. We shall fall away from true ideals if we avoid the claims of life-force by covering the fertile plains of Bengal with shrines and castles. Even in olden times Bengal where Man has been welcomed and worshipped has been an eye-sore to India's leaders, ridden by the sastras and rites. Bengal has ever remained free from the shackles of sastric injunctions. Buddhism, Jainism—all these liberal religions have remained powerful in Bengal which grew up independent of ties with Indian *sadhana*. That free current is coursing through Bengal's Vaishnavism and Baul cult. Bengal's *sadhana* has laid emphasis on Man."

Bengal knows how to eliminate and to assimilate.

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the methodology of history, Prof. Dhurjati Prasad Mukherji's *On Indian History* may be consulted. It is a study on method, not on Indian history.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore's observations are recorded by Mr. Kshiti Mohan Sen in the Preface to *Banglar Sadhana* (Bengal's Culture).

The powers of elimination and assimilation are the greatest assets of Bengal's culture. Tagore was, in that sense, a typical product of Bengal's culture. Bengal is a fertile land, so the miserly spirit of hoarding is not its characteristic; it is a plain and undulated tract, so it does not suffer from a sense of separateness that nurses exclusiveness; it is not weighed down under the load of the past, so it does not preserve temples, abodes of mythological gods and goddesses, but Bengal is the sanctuary of Man. Bengal has found the God in Man and looked upon God as the object of human love and adoration; it has not seen the universe through the window of the sastric injunctions and religious rites. The religion of Man is the religion of Bengal; Bengal is the meeting ground of different races and cultures; out of this Man has stood vindicated. Ethnologically, the Bengalee race is the product of various tribes. The soil of Bengal became the homeland of all, and it gave birth to Bengal's culture.

It is only partially true that the history of a nation is cast in the arms of nature. The soil and the climate of Bengal gave Bengal's culture a peculiar mould, but the human factors are no less negligible. The Mongolian, the Garo-Khasia tribes, the Santhal-Bhil-Kol sects, the Aryan, the Dravidian—they all worked together to introduce rich, creative and human tunes to the music of Bengal's culture. This "human geography" is an important factor to take note of. The different tribes and sects became baptized into a common Bengalee race which carved out a religion, founded on the essential recognition of the human duty in all aspects of life. Hence, Bengal is most responsive, intensely emotional, but in no way obstinate and conservative. Bengal does not cling like a bat, hoard like a miser; she has the abandon and generosity of a loving mistress, seeking for sympathy, understanding and love.

## THE CULT OF POWER

It is not to be neglected that "peoples are living beings" and that "they have their distinct personalities." But "the nations are organisations of power." The spirit of the people seeks harmony and order; it wants to send up its offshoots for the revival of human personality, but the methods of the Nation are not conducive to the higher ideals of humanity; they improve national efficiency at the cost of human personality; they are proud, conceited, run at a break-neck speed. According to Tagore, humanity, where it is living, is guided by inner ideals; the Nation does not strive for growth, but merely augmentation; it hardens the living man who creates and turns man into an efficient machine for production and destruction. Thus the foundation, the living nature of man, is destroyed, and the organisation of the Nation occupies the field. It is a terrible situation. "The modern towns which present the physiognomy of this dominance of the Nation are everywhere the same, from San Francisco to London, from London to Tokyo;—they show no faces but merely masks."<sup>1</sup>

In the name of the Nation the instinct of the clan is held sacred, so we find selfishness, hatred, vanity and greed extolled in the collective aspect of national instincts. Nations celebrate massacres and pillages by thanking God in their churches and temples. To Tagore it was a staggering experience. With the ideals of the Nation, there is an attitude of defiance against moral law, because the lesson has been scrupulously propagated that "the Nation is greater than the people." Tagore described "the spirit of national selfishness" as "the brain disease of a people," whereas, according to him, "it is the power of self-sacrifice, the moral faculty of sympathy and co-operation which is the guiding spirit of social vitality." When the relation of harmony with its surroundings is impaired, there is

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's Introduction to Paul Richard's *To the Nations*.

“fever-flush” which is mistaken as the best sign of health. The remedy is that men must forget their idolatry of the baser passions. The higher era of civilisation must take its root in “our moral ideals,” not in our national selfishness. That was Tagore’s central thesis, all through his writings; so he put faith not in new institutions but in living individuals who would become “the channels of universal moral truth.”

It is not to be misunderstood that Tagore was pleading for absolute individualism. Individual liberty must be subordinated to the contents of social cohesion and welfare, and that is what universal moral laws prescribe. The regimentation involving violence, suppression and militarism is to be discarded, and there should always be scope for the enlargement of human personality. It is by this test that all forms of social and governmental control will be judged.

Tagore frankly recognised that “power in all its forms is irrational, it is like the horse that drags the carriage blindfold.”<sup>1</sup> The moral element in it is only represented in the man who drives the horse. Thus, the human material must not be impaired. It is degraded if the temptation to tyrannise others grows strong; it is deprived of creative virtues if the contact with the human world is obtruded or forced into anti-social grooves. “Evil on one side naturally begets evil on the other, injustices leading to violence and insult to vengefulness.”<sup>2</sup> That is why the great gift of freedom can never come to a people through charity; they must win it before they can own it. This led Tagore to urge that “India must stand unabashed before the arrogance that scoffs at the power of spirit.” And this led him to proclaim that “selfishness is at the bottom of all conflicts.” The world will be wrecked unless men can find a new spiritual faith in which they can all grow together. “The trouble

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s letter to Mahatma Gandhi, dated April 12, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



is that everybody wants something, everything they can get, that very few are willing to give.”<sup>1</sup>

Tagore detested force in all its manifestations; he understood love and sympathy, grace and sacrifice. Accordingly, he avoided power politics, the cult of power philosophy. He even disdained the building up of a well-knit organisation to maintain the supremacy of his ideologies. In the drama, *Raja-O-Rani* (The King and the Queen), written in 1889, Tagore made king Bikram kneel before Queen Sumitra's dead body at the end of the play and exclaim in repentance :

“ Goddess, I was not worthy of thy love.  
Wouldst thou not pardon therefore ? Hast thou gone,  
Holding me fast in guilt for evermore ?  
I would have begged thy pardon in this life,  
With tears incessant. Hast thou ta'en the chance ?  
Thou, like a God, wast stern, immovable !  
Not vain thy punishment, and sentence hard ! ”

The queen had to atone for the king's action by her death. In the drama *Bisarjan* (Sacrifice) written in 1890, Tagore showed the triumph of faith which repudiated all blood-sacrifices. Raghupati, the priest, justified bloody sacrifice to the goddess Kali by “ a biased interpretation of the commands of ancient writings.” Jaysinha, his disciple, was rent with doubts. In Gobinda's words :

“ Sin has to ripen to its ugly fulness before it bursts and dies hideously. When King's blood is shed by a brother's hand, then lust for blood will disclose its devil's face, leaving its disguise of goddess.”

At last Raghupati realised the impotence of the idol of Sakti he has served :

“ Look, how she stands there, the silly stone,—dead, dumb, blind,—the whole sorrowful world weeping at her door,—the noblest hearts wrecking themselves at her stony feet ! ”

Tagore proclaimed the warm sanctities of human love, based on sympathy and understanding.

In his novels, *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World)

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's statement in New York (published in the New York Herald, November 1, 1920).

and *Char Adhyay* (Four Chapters), power philosophy and party politics throttling down the human instincts of love and the free expression of sympathy and understanding came in for a good deal of condemnation. Can it not be urged that this detestation of power in all forms prevented him from formulating a cult of his own and from encaging his ideologies in attractive shells for popular acceptance ?

It is true that many things in popular Hinduism "vexed him intensely." Tagore understood Hinduism much better than many of the orthodox interpreters, but he could not accept crude Saktism (or Tantrikism), which had a strong hold on Bengal. "Saktism, the worship of Sakti or force, personified as one of the aspects of Kali, has had no attraction for him. Upon Saktism, and the legends which cluster round the name of his countrymen's favourite goddess, he has drawn less for imagery than upon any other form of Hindu symbolism. Yet about this cult cluster scenes vigorous and awe-inspiring in the extreme, all the gloomy, lovely horror of the burning-grounds, with their skulls and smouldering fires, their constant, leaping flames. It is significant that in his praise of Bengal he personifies her as Lakshmi, the gentle, gracious queen of beauty and good fortune. Saktism the cult of the capricious queen of force and destruction, he dislikes intensely, and has exposed its ignoble roots."<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edward Thompson<sup>2</sup> records the following defence put up by the Poet himself :

"I take my idea of saktism from the popular notion of it. The ideal of life which you find in Kabikankan is very mean. When I was very young, I wrote a criticism of him which made folk very angry, and I was punished with abuse. They thought that, because I was a Brahmo, I could not enter into the spirit of these wonderful things ; that I criticised as a Brahmo. But they didn't know I was not a Brahmo, practically speaking. But to return to Kabikankan. What our people felt at that time was their utter impotence in the tyranny of power and the waywardness of fate. Sakti tried all kinds 'of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edward Thompson's *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

mean dodges to raise her favourite to the throne—to dethrone the Kalinga King, and put up another. This was delightful to people. In this lay their chance, to please this capricious goddess. That idea still lingered in our political life. Because the Kabikankan poet was a poor man, and oppressed, he dreamed of power.”

Tagore refused “to transform Kali-worship into nation-worship.” During the partition agitation in Bengal, he was requested to further the spread of Sakti-worship through his songs, but he “carried his flowers of worship elsewhere.” “No one has felt more the fascination of that grandest figure of the Indian imagination, the ascetic Mahadeva, Kali’s consort. But when the sense of terror embodies itself in a figure with lolling, blood-stained tongue and staring, ghoulish eyes, simplicity lost in a welter of repulsive crudities, he has stood aside.”<sup>1</sup> This is important to find out the psychological make-up of Tagore.

### THE TAGORE THESIS

“Eattvamasi” (That are thou)—this represents the fundamental teaching of the Upanishads. “That” refers to “Brahman” and “thou” to the inquirer. That is, the individual self is identical with Brahman, the inmost being. There can be no liberation unless the soul realises that it is one with Brahman. This realisation can be best attained by service to fellow-beings. This was the religion of Tagore.

Tagore believed that besides this material world, there was the world of beauty, goodness and truth. He called it “the world of personality.” The foundation of this world of personality is Love, because “the most intense consciousness of our own personality comes to us through love, through a realisation of unity with others, which illumines our hearts with a radiance of joy.” Love is the principle of the spiritual world, the principle of unity, and “the realisation of this principle of unity gives us the power

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

which leads to our fulfilment in the spiritual world.” In other words, the recognition of the principle of Love, as the centre of our spiritual life, can be made concrete through love’s service in the human world. Then the service of man, prompted by love, was the vital truth with Tagore, and it was the character of the Infinite Soul, which is bathed in the light of eternal love. “We, in our human nature, have a hunger for truth which is immense, for something a great deal more than what we need immediately for the purposes of life. Men all through their history have been struggling to realise this truth according to the unfolding of their idea of the Infinite, and have been gradually changing their methods and planes of existence, constantly meeting failures, but never owning final defeat.”<sup>1</sup>

It was, therefore, one of Tagore’s central points that social unrest was prevalent to-day all over the world owing to “the anarchy of spirit in the modern civilisation.” That is, the spiritual basis is undermined; there is the extension of the individual self and the shrinkage of the infinite soul; community life is stifled and social qualities spurned for the accommodation of selfish rights and obligations. We have burnt up life in insatiate self-gratification. He urged mankind to strive for *mukti*, that is liberation from the dark enclosure of the self. “Freedom is in the harmony of communication through which we find no obstruction in realising our own being in the surrounding world.” The Indian concept of *mukti* lays emphasis not on bare and barren isolation. In the human world, those who own responsibilities and obligations are really free in the political and social field. The segregation of an eclipsed life is that of a savage. In the East we have more faith in personality, in human relationship. All our attachments are keenly personal, human. Science deals with the impersonal, the non-human, the mechanical, the things that

<sup>1</sup> Tagore’s Notes and Comments. Published in the Visva-Bharati Quarterly, July 1925.

can be weighed and measured and tabulated. Science is undoubtedly useful ; it is the necessary condition of progress, but Man must not be forgotten." " It is tautology to speak of man as human ; but it contains a profound truth. For it is man that is all important, it is man who lives, not the machine. If any nation has the gift of conserving its human relations then that is life, eternal life ; for that is man's truth, man's ideal, man's goal—not railways, factories and machinery, but humanity."<sup>1</sup> This Eastern characteristic is not to be sacrificed, because " doctors know that infusion of animal blood into human veins does not give vigour to man but produces death, and the intrusion of the animal into humanity will never be for its survival." It is " an organised passion of greed that is stalking abroad in the name of European civilisation." The spirit of organisation is not social in character, but utilisation. Hence, efficiency itself is demoralising personal human relationship.

Some of our countrymen who are in sympathy with the Marxist philosophy proclaim that India can be forced on to progress along determined lines according to fixed patterns, so much to their liking and choice. They forget the elementary principle of Marxian dialectics that an objective situation changes and takes shape " according to the nature of the impact, the character of action, thought and direction." It is the implicit which becomes explicit, and accordingly in our political and economic life, the objective can be best analysed on the true assessment of the special characteristics of the nation, of the nation's mode of living and thinking. To achieve higher synthesis out of the inner contradictions, these factors cannot be trifled with—the characteristic traits of the nation, the character and efficiency of direction, the nature of the conflict. Human society is, therefore, capable of development in different directions ; it does not move on fixed

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's essay on *The Soul of the East*, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, April 1925.

patterns. Hence, every nation progresses in its own way. This richness and variety in human civilisation is to be accepted as a stern reality ; the one nation does not necessarily walk the path of the other. This was the central thesis of Tagore.

The cry of equality is a romantic outburst. Biologists lay stress on human inequality : revolutionary thinkers have found from experience that complete equality of income for all is not possible, nor is it desirable. Engels wrote : " The real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the demand for the abolition of classes. Any demand for equality which goes beyond that, of necessity passes into absurdity." It is also to be recognised that " Marxism starts out with the assumption that people's tastes and requirements are not, and cannot be, equal in quality or in quantity, either in the period of socialism or the period of communism."<sup>1</sup> Life, liberty and happiness are the inalienable rights of man, but they are to be ensured. In addition to economic inequality, " there is the more formidable, the less remediable inequality which exists between individuals of different psychological types." Even with equality of income, the universe of two individuals may be profoundly dissimilar. The gap is to be acknowledged, and reciprocal good behaviour can only mitigate its bad effects. Tagore, accordingly, sought to build the social structure in a way that obstacles to free, sympathetic and frequent contacts between individuals are removed. Paranoiac ambition is to be checked at the source and not to be admired as a virtue ; the temptation to abuse a position of authority and influence is to be suppressed. He, therefore, thought of decentralisation of power, the division of society into inter-related and mutually responsible groups. Political inequalities are to be discouraged and natural inequalities submerged under strict,

<sup>1</sup> Stalin in a report to the seventeenth Congress of C. P. S. U., quoted by Prof. J. B. S. Haldane in *Heredity and Politics*.

disciplined and regulated social intercourse flowing from sympathy and understanding. The need is for equality in action, equality in service to mankind, and equality in restricting one's greed, power-impulse and profit-motive. Tagore was a realist, so he stood for co-operative enterprise where differences are not to be eliminated forcibly but canalised for service to man with the minimum of frictions. The decline of the community and of the community sense in individuals was the greatest disaster according to Tagore, and the correlation of human particles into a pattern of responsible, communal living was, therefore, the major task. Aldous Huxley in *Ends and Means* lays emphasis on the atomistic life in the city and on the impoverishment of community life in the village with the ardour and passion of Tagore. The problem of the age is : how shall individual life be given a communal pattern ? How shall the individual be incorporated in a responsible, self-governing group ? Huxley agreed with Tagore that the political road to a better society was the road of decentralisation and responsible self-government. He practically echoed Tagore and observed :

"The goal of those who wish to change society for the better is freedom, justice and peaceful co-operation between non-attached, yet active and responsible individuals. Is there the smallest reason to suppose that such a goal can be reached through police espionage, military slavery, the centralisation of power, the creation of an elaborate political hierarchy, the suppression of free discussion and the imposition of an authoritarian system of education. Obviously and emphatically, the answer is No."

Reforms yield the best results when they are carried out by "the right sort of means and in the right sort of governmental, administrative and educational contexts." Accordingly, our chief business is to create enlightened, intelligent, informed and determined individuals and to see them acting in concert for freedom, justice and peace on right lines. All this postulates the creation of a desirable social order which had been the cherished ideal of Tagore. The real progress of a social order consists in the extension

of charity, of goodwill. If we appeal to the evidence of history, we shall find that there can be no progress in charity by means essentially uncharitable. The dictatorship of the Party calls for the definition of national interests in tune with the interests of Party leaders, that prejudices democracy. True democracy should give that frame of life within which "individual men and groups of men can develop most richly and harmoniously their gifts and inclinations." It is not a mere form of Government; it should permit the maximum of flexibility and growth, and it thus gives to human history a direction and a meaning. Tagore stood for this basic ideal of democracy. He could not forge chains for the ascendancy of persons or groups; he advocated the expansion of social justice in the interests of true principles of democracy. He was alive to the fuller social implications of democracy—disinterested acknowledgment of all human claims.<sup>1</sup> The use of the nationalist feeling to further the interests of Party leaders was, according to Tagore, the most heinous offence. That is, in the worst sense, "Machiavelli's Prince in action." A system which extinguishes all values save the cult of power must enslave mankind. Tagore could not accept such a philosophy. The outlaw must not be placated; the gunman must not be given obedience. Psychologically, men cannot grow under the regime of power politics; they must sooner or later discover the unalterable laws for the promotion of social justice, to be shared by all. Tagore's

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Ralph Barton Perry of Harvard University, who is an exponent of the critical realist school of modern American philosophy, points out that the core of modern democracy consists in an attitude which comprises three things: (a) the acknowledgment of the manhood of each and every human individual; (b) a respect for the generic essence of manhood, however slight its traces, as comprising those faculties of reason and conscience through which the light of truth finds its way into the natural world; (c) an all-comprising and compassionate love of individual men/as seekers after truth. Prof. Perry discusses in his book, *Our Side is Right*, the connotations of modern democracy. His approach fits in with Tagore's concept of democracy which focusses attention on the manhood of men and develops its fuller social implications on a disinterested acknowledgment of all human claims.



accent of protest against "the outlaw's machine of domination" is lost and cannot be caught "in the clamour of applause the outlaws organise upon their own behalf." The world is on fire because people lie enchained in body and mind; the flames can only be extinguished if they are freed from the shell-lives and slavish habits. Professor Laski rightly observed that "men cannot destroy the counter-revolution if some part of them gives allegiance to its principles. Our gravest danger is a very real one that in the name of democracy and freedom we destroy democracy and freedom." The vital need is to infect the entire people with faith in the claims of freedom. Any attempt to draw a *cordon sanitaire* about ideas is not helpful for the growth of free and creative minds, and as such it historically encourages the setting in of reactionarism. Power politics pushes the country often into the arena of such blind forces.

Professor Laski was very clear in pointing out that when the war came in 1939, the British were, for all effective purposes, "a counter-revolutionary power in the Far East." The British position in India is this. Both in the material and in the intellectual realm, Indians have made less progress in a century and a half of British rule than the one-time subject nationalities of the Soviet Union have made in twenty-five years. Secondly, the British are not accepting the terms of equal collaboration with Indians. Counter-revolution can only be successfully fought with revolutionary means. Professor Laski indicts the British Government thus: "To seek, as we are doing, to arrest its fulfilment (in the East) is to put ourselves, in this theatre of operation, on the side of counter-revolution. We are then in the contradictory position of fighting a counter-revolution in Europe the interests of which we are objectively promoting in Asia."<sup>1</sup> Such contradiction is weakening the power of the British to win

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, by Prof. Harold Laski, p. 286.

in Europe. It is often ignored by Britons that "no State which dominates the life of an alien people is fit to be the judge in its own cause ; it may have moments of passionate moralism about its obligations."<sup>1</sup> British exploitation will not easily end, at least so long as the exploitation pays. It can end if the root of British rule is taken away, if the British themselves in the interests of cordial relationship "temper the wind to the shorn lamb." That will be determined by the choice of the ruling classes in Britain. "Desires without deeds," wrote Blake, "breed no more than pestilence." Britain often expresses generous intentions which are not backed up by positive policies. The appropriate moment for decision and action has come ; it may pass off unused. That will be most unfortunate, as the possibilities of adjustment will be ruled out. The betrayal of a natural historical process is always a fatal one. It is true that "one of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea," as put by Bagehot, but in this grave hour of history in India, the bridge between the past traditional ways of life and the future society of expanding welfare on the basis of freedom, equality and justice, shall have to be established. It undoubtedly means acceptance of new and revolutionary ideas and tasks, and that is to be achieved. Tagore incessantly tried for the establishment of the bridge—the bridge that unites the past and the future as the foundation of a higher synthesis.

It is difficult to be dogmatic about national character, but unless we keep ourselves vigilant, counter-revolutionary forces are likely to overpower us. The masses in India are not conscious ; there is a wide gulf between the rich and the poor ; there is chronic scarcity of many essential things. "Counter-revolution is nothing so much as the denial of the ordinary man's right to express the meaning one finds in life ; it is the imposition of alien

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

experience upon one to own, the enforcement of a dogma from without upon a faith that has grown from within ; it is the arrest of the movement of mind and conscience in the individual in favour of dogmatic commands which he must accept even to his own frustration ; it is the denial that spontaneity is valid, the insistence, accordingly, that we are instruments and not ends." If this analysis of counter-revolution, as shown by Professor Laski, is correct, condition in India is encouraging for the emergence of counter-revolutionary forces, that is, for the growth of militant leadership of the minority. Counter-revolution succeeds under given historical conditions, and those conditions are prevailing in India. Established expectations are frustrated ; the sense of defeatism is profound and keen ; there is no cohesion and unity in the community life. In the circumstances, the prospect of a counter-revolution in India is bright, the more so when it is under the surveillance of the British Government representing counter-revolutionary spirit, so far as the Eastern theatre is concerned. Tagore had faith in humanity, as man's nature is to rebel against authority. to affirm his excellence, to strive for continuous expansion. In his view, we must bring about a revolutionary situation wherein the nature of man must stand vindicated. Judged in this historical context, Tagore was the greatest enemy of the counter-revolution. We have set our feet on the path of counter-revolution ; we can only be moved on to the right direction under the revolutionary doctrines of Tagore, revolutionary in the sense that he was keenly alive and responsive to the claims of freedom and justice for all, irrespective of the weak and the strong. He knew and accepted that "security, freedom, equality, knowledge and peace" were the essential conditions for the realisation of "expanding welfare" for humanity. He was at war, perpetual war, with the counter-revolutionary forces in society. He accepted the premises that men and women were ends in themselves and that the fulfilment of

individual personality would enrich society. And Tagore desired "a revolution by consent." History gives us an opportunity to bring about a silent and non-violent revolution, but it is wisdom that can take advantage of it. If we fail to 'elevate the common man by virtue of revolution by consent, the grim alternative is the violent shaking up of the structure by militant leaders. Tagore must be listened to, if we agree to the revolution by consent. Revolution by force is risky because the exhaustion that such revolution brings about often breeds inertia and neurosis which throw the nation into the fold of reactionary forces. "The more violence, the less revolution," because violence and the effects of violence are unrevolutionary. A revolution is successful, if it leads to progress; and progress is real, if there is progress in charity, to quote Dr. Marett's words. Progress in charity here means the extension of the acts of justice and goodwill. Tagore's whole emphasis was on the trimming of violence in order to avoid its counter-revolutionary effects. We can appreciate Tagore's teachings in the context of historical experience, if we meditate closely on the following analysis.<sup>1</sup> "Violence can produce only the effects of violence; these effects can be undone only by compensatory non-violence after the event; where violence has been used for a long period, a habit of violence is formed, and it becomes exceedingly difficult for the perpetrators of violence to reverse their policy. Moreover, the results of violence are far-reaching beyond the wildest dreams of the often well-intentioned people who resort to it. The iron dictatorship of the Jacobins resulted in military tyranny, twenty years of war, conscription in perpetuity for the whole of Europe, the rise of nationalistic idolatry. In our own time the long-drawn violence of Tsarist oppression, and the acute, catastrophic violence of the world war produced the iron dictatorship of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, by Aldous Huxley, p. 28.

Bolsheviks. The threat of world-wide revolutionary violence begot Fascism ; Fascism produced re-armament ; re-armament has entailed the progressive de-liberalisation of the democratic countries. . . . . If we wish to make large-scale reforms which will not stultify themselves in the process of application, we must choose our measures in such a way that no violence or, at the worst, very little violence be needed to enforce them."

Even after World War II the world is sinking back again into the old order. It is true that the old order of monarchies and dictatorships by privileged classes is falling into disfavour, but the search for new truths and the expansion of the human spirit are stifled. If Britain denies freedom to India, Holland to Indonesia and France to Indo-China, and if imperialistic exploitation of the East by European countries continue, bad days for humanity are not over. With one-third of the world in political bondage and economic slavery, the future can hardly be brightened, even though the United Nations Organisation, adumbrated at San Francisco, has taken over the role, functions, assets of the League of Nations. But the problem is that although all men desire peace, very few desire those things which make for peace. We must be prepared to pay the price of peace, but events show that we are not. In this era of atom bombs, international understanding is not only desirable but essential. It is only through cheerful co-operation of all nations that mankind may move to a higher level of civilisation. It is science that is not at fault ; it is human minds, instinct with suspicion and distrust, that are really subversive of and hostile to the union of nation-States under the League of Nations.

The belief is to be discarded that the ideal of *mukti* (liberation) in India is based upon a philosophy of passivity. "The complete truth is in the harmony of the infinite and the finite, the passive ideal of perfection and the active process of its revealment." Tagore pointed

out that according to the Ishopanishad, "he who pursues the knowledge of the infinite as an absolute truth sinks even into a deeper darkness than he who pursues the cult of the finite as complete in itself."<sup>1</sup> It is a broken truth, when there is a search for the infinite or for the finite without the necessary reconciliation or rhythm. "Life in a half world is evil, because it feigns finality when it is obviously incomplete, giving us the cup, but not the draught of life." The tragedy of India consists in her running after the fragmentary truth. When we seek to dissociate ourselves from the surrounding human world, we are overpowered by the blankness of utter sterility. This has shaped Tagore's ideals of service, philosophy of life. Respect for fellow-beings is the necessary condition of Tagore's conception of divinity. That is Tagore's religion. It is, therefore, social wisdom to concern oneself with the welfare of the community, the well-being of humanity. He truly observed: "God's world is given to us; when we offer our world to God, then is the gift realised." In this canopy of modern civilisation the human personality is shut off from the rest of society. Under Indian conditions individuals lie imprisoned in a cage. It means that man is taken away from his normal humanity. Tagore deplored it most; his dream had been to create human beings "who should be surrounded by an environment of creative work."

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his book, *The Discovery of India*, passionately felt that the Indian people had vast stores of suppressed energy and ability, and he wanted to release the hidden forces and to make them feel young and vital again. If Indian people lacked this vitality, he had no illusion that "our political efforts and shouting were all make-believe and would not carry us far." Tagore wanted to tap the springs of energy and strength and to

<sup>1</sup> Tagore's Presidential Address at the Indian Philosophical Congress, published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, January 1926.

rejuvenate the people. Without this vital energy, all efforts are ineffective. The dam that checks the flow must be taken away; the eddies that impede currents are to be removed. It is no good, "just carrying on after the manner of the aged, quiescent, devitalised, uncreative, desiring peace and sleep above all else," as Pandit Jawaharlal puts it. Tagore lived on the hope that India would find herself again, and he laboured hard for the fulfilment of his hope. His social reconstruction programme was attuned to the discovery of India and to the creation of conditions for the release of energy and vitality of the Indian people. To put it in the words of Dr. Sten Konow who worked in the Visva-Bharati :

"We confidently hope and we firmly believe that Rabindranath Tagore's ideal is an eternal truth, and not only a dream, and that the day will come when the world will speak of him, not only as a poet, but still more as a prophet, and above all as a leader, who has laid the world under deep obligation in showing the way towards goodwill, towards harmony, towards peace."

The dream of Tagore has become the trust of particularly the Indian nation; it is for us to cherish, sustain and pursue his ideals. We are living in explosive times. It is a rare privilege to be able to play our part in the fashioning of the world order. We need Tagore, the great sentinel and the master architect, in the evolving and the designing of the new scheme of things, enriched by the splendour of his vision and the depths of his wisdom. Tagore described himself as "a wayfarer of an endless road" and extended greetings to all comrades of the road. He trusted: "I know that my dreams that are still unfulfilled, and my melodies still unstruck, are clinging to some lute-strings of thine, and they are not altogether lost."





# INDEX

## A

*Achalayatan*, 253  
 Acton, Lord, 250  
 Ahmed, Sir Syed, 193, 194  
 Ahmed, Sayyid, 204  
*Aitareya Brahmana*, 13  
 Akbar, 177  
 Aligarh Movement, 194  
 Amritsar Massacres, 24  
 Andrews, C. F., 27, 30, 55, 63, 64, 65,  
 102, 103, 104, 121, 146, 222, 224, 231,  
 280, 282, 283, 287  
 Arnold, Matthews, 214  
*Aryogya*, 115  
 Asoka, 44, 46, 300  
 Atharva Veda, 14, 50, 51, 52, 53  
 Atlantic Charter, 167  
*Atma-Parichaya*, 200, 201  
*Atyukti*, 230

## B

Banerjee, Surendranath, 19  
*Bangadarshan*, 8  
 Barbusse, Henri, 250  
*Baroari Mangal*, 153, 230  
 Baul, 11, 16, 17, 42, 311  
*Bau-Thakuranir Hat*, 233  
 Bengal District Gazetteers, 5  
 Bengal Partition, 7, 8, 9, 23, 26, 27, 127  
 Bergson, 111, 116  
 Bernard Shaw, 87, 87, 93  
 Bhagavatism, 300  
*Bhandar*, 26  
*Bharat-barsha*, 35  
*Bharatbarsha Itihasar Dharu*, 37  
*Bibechana-o-Abibechana*, 149  
*Bisarjan*, 315  
 Blake, 324  
 Bose, Rajnarain, 4  
 Bradlaugh, 3  
 Brahmo-Samaj, 56  
 Brahma, 43, 45  
 Brailsford, H. N., 226, 304  
 Bright, 3  
 British Indian Association, 3  
 Bryan, P. W., 307, 309  
 Brunhes, Jean, 308  
 Buchanan, Prof., 226  
 Buddha, 11, 12, 13, 21, 40, 45, 46, 50,  
 52, 65, 81, 137, 299  
 Buddhism, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 50, 52,  
 55, 298, 299, 300, 311  
 Burke, 22  
 Burnham, Dr. James, 92, 95  
*Byadhi-o-Tahar Pratikar*, 27, 188, 189

## C

Calcutta University Commission, 266  
*Chaitanya*, 14, 15, 47, 55, 56,

Chakravarty, Dr. Amiya, 184  
 Chandidas, 15  
*Chandalika*, 182  
*Char- Adhyay*, 27, 238, 316  
 Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra, 19  
 Chaudhuri, Pramatha, 146  
 Chelmsford, Lord, 220  
 Chiang Kai-Shek, 137  
*Choto-o-Baro*, 10, 13, 123, 179, 210, 211  
 Christ, 21, 81, 137  
*City And Village*, 85, 143  
 Communal Award, 28, 184  
 Communist Manifesto, 83, 90, 91  
 Cotton, Sir Henry, 3  
*Creative Unity*, 35, 36, 41, 44, 48, 69,  
 70, 72, 105, 106, 131, 135, 152, 166,  
 169, 171, 255  
 Croce, Benedetto, 94, 296  
 Curzon, Lord, 7, 26, 33

## D

*Dakghar*, 253  
 Dante, 18  
 Das Gupta, Prof. B. N., 298  
*Desh-huta*, 190  
 Disraeli, 3  
 Dravidian, 43, 56, 130, 312  
 Dufferin, Lord, 3  
 Dyer, General, 220, 222

## E

*East And West*, 48  
 East India Company, 3, 60, 203  
*Ebar Firao Moray*, 6  
 Eliot, T. S., 258  
 Ellis, Havelock, 93, 144,  
 Engels, F., 83, 84, 90, 99, 101, 141, 165,  
 310  
*Ethical Religion*, 29

## F

Fawcett, 3  
 Formichi, Prof. Carlo, 51  
 Freud, Dr. Sigmund, 96  
*Fruit-Gathering*, 136, 168  
*Fugitive*, 124  
 Fuller, Sir Bamfylde, 7

## G

Galileo, 81  
 Gandhi, Mahatma, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26,  
 28, 29, 30, 73, 104, 117, 228, 231,  
 238, 240, 261, 282, 314  
 Garibaldi, 22  
*Gardener, The*, 111  
 Geeta, the, 47, 55  
*Ghare-Baire*, 27, 107, 108, 109, 238, 242,  
 243, 315  
 Ghose, Aravinda, 27, 28

*Gitanjali*, 53, 112, 113, 120, 198

Gladstone, 3, 22

Goethe, 19, 59, 164

*Gora*, 254

*Greater India*, 25, 121

Gupta, Atulchandra, 301

Guha, B. C., 310

Gupta Empire, 44, 45, 300, 301

## H

Haldane, Prof. J. B. S., 57, 88, 101, 320

Harshavardhana, 45, 300

Hegel, 61, 64, 97, 98

Heine, 19

Hinayana, 46

Hindus, Maurice, 89

Hindu Mela, 4

*Hindu Visvavidyalay*, 198, 199

Hobson, 145

Hume, A. O., 3

Huns, 300

Hunter, Dr. W. W., 204

Huxley, Aldous, 261, 321, 326

Huxley, Julian, 292

## I

Indian Association, 19

Indian National Congress, 3, 19, 24, 106, 240

Indian Philosophy, systems of, 298

*India's Prayer*, 106

Indus Valley Civilisation, 298

Inge, Dean, 116

Iqbal, Sir Muhammad, 194

## J

Jagnavalkya-Smiriti, 300

Jainism, 45, 298, 311

James, William, 116

Janak, 37

*Janmadine*, 114, 115

*Japan Yatri*, 284

*Jatri*, 217, 218, 219

Jeze, Prof., 89

Jinnah, M.A., 130, 185, 197

Joydev, 15

*Judgment*, 297

## K

Kabikankan, 316, 317

Kabir, 11, 15, 16, 47, 55, 56

*Kalantar*, 172, 179, 192, 200

*Kaler Jatra*, 254

Kanishka, 300

*Kartar Ichay Karma*, 179

Khilafat, 24, 192, 193, 194

Kipling, 153

Koestler, Arthur, 290

Koran, The, 96

Konow, Dr. Sten, 329

Krishna, 15, 38, 47

## L

Lao-tze, 118, 159, 161

Laski, Prof. Harold, 89, 90, 134, 323

Lenin, 82, 91, 95

Leninism, 95, 96

Lesny, Prof. V., 111, 116

Lincoln, Abraham, 109

*Loka-Hit*, 86, 115

Lytton, Lord, 2

## M

Madhva, 55

Mahabharata, the, 40, 47

Mahammad, 21

Mahavira, 40

Mahmud, 33, 45

Mahayana, 46

*Man*, 66, 110, 115

Manu, 40, 301

Manu-Samhita, 44, 300

*Manuser Dharma*, 115

Marx, 61, 62, 66, 81, 82, 84, 90, 93, 96, 97, 99, 100, 141, 294, 310

Marxist, 11, 4, 9, 62, 66, 72, 99, 101, 141, 142, 143, 165, 310, 319, 320

Matsya Nyaya, 305

Mauryas, 44

Mazzini, 22

*Meaning of Art, the*, 50

Mimansa, 298

Montessori, Dr. Maria, 260

Morel, E. D., 165

Morgan, 88

Mukherji, Prof. D. P., 311

*Mukta-dhara*, 27, 138, 233, 239, 240, 253

Murray, Prof. Gilbert, 22, 122, 150, 249

*Music And Feeling*, 4

Mussolini, 146

Mutiny, the, 1, 2, 19, 193, 194, 203

*My Reminiscences*, 1, 4

## N

Nag, Dr. Kalidas, 172, 182

Nalanda University, 285

Nanak, 47, 55, 56

Nanda Kings, 44

Narahari, 17

*Nationalism*, 35, 72, 128, 130, 132, 186, 171, 186, 213, 214

Naya, 298

Nehru, Pt. Jawaharlal, 30, 328, 329

*Nirjharer Swapnabhanga*, 4, 5

Noguchi, Yone, 1337

Non-co-operation Movement, 24, 104, 231, 282

## O

O'Dwyer, Sir Michael, 220

O'Malley, L. S., 5

*On the Way To Java*, 156, 157

## P

Pakistan Movement, 19, 41

Pala Emperors, 45  
 Paritrnan, 233-36  
*Panchabhuter Dayari*, 111  
*Path-o-Patheya*, 27  
 Pavlov, 102  
 Pearson, W. W., 24, 103, 120, 248  
*Personality*, 69, 277  
 Petroff, Prof. F. N., 272  
*Philosophy of Leisure*, 18  
 Plekhanov, 100  
*Poems*, 106, 126, 127  
*Prabhat-Sangit*, 4  
*Prachya-o-Paschatya Sahhyata*, 130  
*Prayaschitta*, 27, 233, 234  
 Puranas, 45  
 Pythagorus, 81

**Q**

Queen's Proclamation 2

**R**

Radhakrishnan, Sir S., 55, 56  
 Rai, Lala Lajpat, 24  
*Raja-o-Rani*, 315  
*Raja-Praja*, 26, 216  
 Rejjab, 110  
*Rakta Karabi*, 139, 253  
 Ramanuja, 55  
 Ramayana, The, 37, 38, 40, 47  
 Ramechandra, 37, 38, 39, 47  
 Rathbone, Miss, 224, 225  
 Ray, Ramananda, 15, 55, 56  
 Ravana, 39  
 Roy Raja Rammohon, 1, 3, 19, 21, 22, 54, 59  
*Religion of Man, the*, 56, 57, 68, 115, 118, 119  
*Religious Education*, 183  
 Rigveda, 13, 50, 51, 52, 53  
 Renan, 128  
 Rex Warner, 290  
 Rolland, Romain, 136, 165, 250, 255  
 Rousseu, 111, 123  
*Rule of the Giant*, 147, 148  
 Russel, Bertrand, 80, 158, 259, 261, 267  
*Russian Chitti*, 35

**S**

*Sadhana*, 12, 53, 63, 64, 65, 66, 143, 170, 176, 258  
*Sadupay*, 190, 197  
 Saivism, 298  
 Sakas, 300  
 Saktism, 298, 316, 317  
 Salvadari, Prof., 147  
*Samasya*, 192  
 Samkhya, 298  
 Samveda, 50  
 Sankara, 55  
*Santiniketan*, 170  
 Santiniketan School, 146, 274-85  
 San Francisco Conference, 167

Sarkar, Prof. B. K., 306  
 Sarkar, Sir Jadunath, 175  
*Satyer Awhan*, 8, 23, 25, 240  
 Sedition Bill, 219, 220  
 Sen, Kshiti Mohan, 13, 15, 16, 311  
 Shelley, 1  
*Siksher Milan*, 281  
*Siksher Her-pher*, 204, 265  
 Sita, 39  
 Siva, 39, 43, 45  
 Smritis, The, 45  
 Socrates., 109  
 Spencer, Herbert, 274  
 Spinoza, 116  
 Stalin, 62, 130, 199  
 Stalinism, 95, 96  
*Stri Majoor*, 6  
*Subicharer Adhikar*, 186  
 Sudra, 44  
 Sunderland, Dr. J., 249, 250  
*Swadeshi Samaj*, 8, 75, 98, 122, 125, 152

**T**

Tagore, Debendranath, 3  
 Tagore, Sudhindranath, 8  
 Takshasila, 285  
*Talks in China*, 20, 159  
*Taser Desh*, 254  
 Tawney, Prof. R. H., 145, 146  
 Thompson, Dr. Edward, 138, 316  
 Tolstoy, 267  
*Tota-Kahini*, 287

**U**

Underhill, Evelyn, 16  
 Upanishads, 11, 12, 41, 47, 51, 52, 55, 64, 72, 143, 144, 257, 299, 317

**V**

Vaisesik, 298  
 Vaisnava, 20, 55, 113  
 Vaisnavism, 11, 14, 15, 311  
 Vanusinha, 15  
 Vasistha, 38  
 Vedanta, 298  
 Vedas, 44, 55, 301  
 Vidyapati, 15  
 Vishnu-Smriti, 300  
 Visnu, 38, 43, 45  
 Visva-Bharati, 271, 272, 282, 285-89  
 Visvamitra, 37, 38

**W**

Wahabi, 193, 194, 204, 205  
 Wells, H. G., 108, 178  
 White, C. L., and Renner, G. T., 308  
 Wordsworth, 1

**Y**

Yajurveda, 50  
 Yen of Shansi, 78, 121, 143  
 Yoga, 298



## THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF TAGORE

“In common with thousands of his countrymen I owe much to one who by his poetic genius and singular purity of life has raised India in the estimation of the world. But I owe also more.”—*Mahatma M. K. Gandhi on Rabindranath Tagore.*

“I wish to pay my deep homage to one who has been as a beacon light to all of us, ever pointing to the finer and nobler aspects of life and never allowing us to fall into the ruts which kill individuals as well as nations.”—*Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on Tagore.*

The compiler of this list of "political writings" of Rabindranath Tagore is fully conscious of its many imperfections. It was undertaken, at the behest of the author of *THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF TAGORE* at a time when owing to circumstances well known to all, free movement was impossible in Calcutta and files of some rare periodicals could not be consulted. For sixty years the poet wrote incessantly on the many aspects of national reconstruction of India; the present compiler must have missed some of these writings. It was not possible, either, to indicate the views expressed in these writings, as the printing of the book was nearly complete when the preparation of this list was undertaken. These omissions detract from the usefulness of this list. Considering, however, that the Poet's political essays in English mostly remain buried in the pages of periodicals, the compiler hopes that this list, which affords at least an indication of the quantity of such writings, will be of some use to the students of the life and work of Rabindranath Tagore.

The section devoted to *LETTERS TO THE EDITORS* etc. was prepared chiefly with the help of the Tagore cuttings preserved by Sri Rathindranath Tagore, now handed over as a gift to the *RABINDRA-BHAVANA* (Tagore Museum), Santiniketan. The compiler is grateful to Sri Gurdial Mullik, Curator, and Sri Sobhanlal Ganguli, Assistant Curator, Tagore Museum, who afforded him all facilities to consult the necessary files; he also wishes to thank Sri Jitendranarayan Sen, who helped him in preparing the press copy, and Sri Nirmalchandra Chattopadhyaya, who first suggested this undertaking.

#### Abbreviations :—

B—Bengali original; E. T.—English Translation :  
 B. T.—Bengali Translation; A. T.—Another Translation :

Bengali month and era have been given whenever  
 a Bengali periodical is referred to.





## ENGLISH

### 1. BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

THE MESSAGE OF INDIA TO JAPAN. *The University*, Tokyo. 1916. A Lecture delivered at the Imperial University of Tokyo. Reprinted *Nationalism*, "Nationalism in Japan" I.

THE SPIRIT OF JAPAN. *Indo-Japanese Association*, Tokyo. 1916. A lecture delivered at the Keio Gijuku University to students of the private colleges of Tokyo and members of the Indo-Japanese Association. Reprinted *Nationalism*, "Nationalism in Japan" II.

NATIONALISM. *Macmillan*. 1917. Contents: "Nationalism in the West"; "Nationalism in Japan"; "Nationalism in India"; "The Sunset of the Century" (B. *Naivedya*, poems 64 to 66, 68 and 93).

GREATER INDIA. *Ganesan*. 1921. Contents: "Our Swadeshi Samaj" (B. *Swadeshi Samaj*, "Samuha"); "The Way to Get it Done" (B. "Saphalatār Sadupāya" *Samuha*); "The One Nationalist Party" (B. *Sabhapatir Abhibhasan*, Pabna Sammelani" *Samuha*); "East and West in Greater India" (B. "Purba O Paschim," *Samaj*).

CREATIVE UNITY. *Macmillan*. 1922: See "East and West"; "The Modern Age"; "The Spirit of Freedom"; "The Nation"; "An Eastern University."

LETTERS FROM ABROAD. *Ganesan*. 1924: Revised Edition. LETTERS TO A FRIEND, George Allen and Unwin, 1928.

TALKS IN CHINA. *Visva-Bharati*. 1925. See "To My Hosts"; "To Students"; "Civilisation and Progress."

LECTURES AND ADDRESSES. *Macmillan*, 1928. See "Civilisation and Progress"; "Construction *versus* Creation"; "International Relations"; "The Voice of Humanity."

CITY AND VILLAGE. *Visva-Bharati*, 1928. Section I: B. *Palli-Prakriti*. (See list of Books and Pamphlets, Bengali).

ON ORIENTAL CULTURE AND JAPAN'S MISSION. *Indo-Japanese Association*, Tokyo, 1929. A lecture delivered to the members of the Indo-Japanese Association, Tokyo.

THE INDIAN SITUATION. *Friends Service Council*, London. 1930.

MAHATMAJI AND THE DEPRESSED HUMANITY. *Visva-bharati*, 1932. Contents: "20th September"; "With Mahatmaji in Poona"; "On Mahatmaji's Birthday." With Bengali versions, and statements etc. issued on the occasion of Mahatmaji's fast in Yervada prison in 1932.

EAST AND WEST. *International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation*, Paris, 1935. Two "Open Letters" by Gilbert Murray and Rabindranath Tagore.

AN ADDRESS. *Radhakumud Mukherjee*, Calcutta, 1936. Presidential Address delivered at a conference held in Calcutta on 15th July 1936 to discuss the Communal Award.

POET TO POET. *Visva-Bharati*, 1939. Full text of correspondence (July-October 1938) between Yone Noguchi and Rabindranath Tagore on the Sino-Japanese conflict.

CRISIS IN CIVILISATION. *Visva-Bharati*, 1941. A message on the occasion of completing his eighty years. B. *Sabhyatār Samkat* (see list of Books and Pamphlets, Bengali).

## 2. ESSAYS

### A. MODERN REVIEW

THE FUTURE OF INDIA. March 1911. B. "Purva O Paschim," *Samaj*.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SIKH POWER. April 1911. B. "Sivaji O Guru Govinda Simha," *Prabasi*, Chaitra 1316. Also, introduction, Sarat Kumar Ray, *Sikh Guru O Sikh Jati*.

THE IMPACT OF EUROPE ON INDIA. May and July 1911. B. "Nutan O Puratan," *Swadesh*.

WOMAN'S LOT IN EAST AND WEST. June 1912. B. "Prachya O Pratichya," *Samaj*.

THE SPRING-HEAD OF INDIAN CIVILISATION. December 1912. B. "Tapovan," *Siksha* vol. i, 1351 ed.

RACE CONFLICT. April 1913. An address delivered at the Congress of the National Federation of Religious Liberals, Rochester, New York.

COMMUNAL LIFE IN INDIA. June 1913. A. T. "Our Swadeshi Samaj," April 1921. B. "Swadeshi Samaj."

MY INTERPRETATION OF INDIAN HISTORY. August and September 1913. B. "Bharatvarshe Itihashe Dhara," *Parichay*.

INDIAN STUDENTS AND WESTERN TEACHERS. April 1916. B. "Chhatrasasantantra," *Siksha* vol. i, 1351 ed.

THE SPIRIT OF JAPAN. June 1917. Reprinted *Nationalism*, "Nationalism in Japan," II.

THE NATION. July 1917. Reprinted *Creative Unity*.

THOU SHALT OBEY. September 1917. B. "Kartar Ichhay Karma," *Kalantar*.

THE SMALL AND THE GREAT. December 1917. B. "Chhoto O Bado," *Kalantar*.

THE MEETING OF THE EAST AND THE WEST. June 1918. Reproduced from *Manchester Guardian*.

AT THE CROSS ROADS. July 1918.

LETTERS FROM AN ONLOOKER. July 1919. B. "Vatayaniker Patra", *Kalantar*.

OUR SWADESHI SAMAJ. April 1921. A. T. "Communal Life in India", June 1913. Reprinted *Greater India*. B. "Swadeshi Samaj", *Samuha*.

A CRY FOR PEACE. April 1921. On the League of Nations.

THE WAY TO GET IT DONE. May 1921. Reprinted *Greater India*. B. "Saphalatār Sadupāya", *Samuha*.

EAST AND WEST IN GREATER INDIA. June 1921. Reprinted *Greater India*. B. "Purva O Paschim", *Samaj*.

EAST AND WEST. September 1921. Reprinted *Creative Unity*.

THE CALL OF TRUTH.<sup>1</sup> October 21. B. "Satyer Ahvan," *Kalantar*.

THE UNION OF CULTURES. November 1921. B. "Sikshar Milan," *Kalantar*.

THE MODERN AGE. December 1921. Reprinted *Creative Unity*.

THE PROBLEM. January 1924. B. "Samasya", *Kalantar*.

THE DEATH TRAFFIC. May 1925. B. "Chine Maraner Byabasya," *Bharati*, Jaistha, 1288.

GETTING AND NOT GETTING. June 1925. B. *Yatri* 2nd ed. pp. 95-104.

THE CULT OF THE CHARKHA.<sup>2</sup> September 1925. B. "Charkha", *Sabuj Patra*, Bhadra 1332.

STRIVING FOR SWARAJ. December 1925. B. "Swaraj Sadhan," *Sabuj Patra* Aswin 1332.

THE SUDRA HABIT.<sup>3</sup> March 1927. B. "Sudradharma," *Kalantar*.

EUROPE, ASIA AND AFRICA. December 1928. For a revised version, see *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* April-July 1929 and *Rabindranath Tagore in Canada*: *Visva-Bharati Bulletin* 14, "India and Europe." B. "Asia O Europe", *Prabasi*, Kartik 1335.

ORGANISATIONS. January 1930. An abridged version of "The Rule of the Great," *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, July 1926.

WEALTH AND WELFARE. February 1930. A revised version of "City and Village," *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, October 1924.

WILL DURANT'S THE CASE FOR INDIA. March 1931. A review.

VOICELESS INDIA. May 1931. A review of Gertrude Emerson's *Voiceless India*.

<sup>1</sup> See Mahatma Gandhi's rejoinder, "The Great Sentinel," *Young India*, 13 October 1921; Reprinted *Young India 1919-22* (Ganesan) vol. ii, pp. 668-75.

<sup>2</sup> See Mahatma Gandhi's rejoinder: "The Poet and the Charkha," *Young India*, reproduced in the *Bombay Chronicle*, 7 November 1925.

<sup>3</sup> For details of a controversy centring round an adaptation of this article published as an interview (e.g. "Use of East Indians in China resented by Tagore". *The Sun*, Baltimore, 5 May 1927), see Chatterjee, *Dvipamay Bharat*, pp. 115-18.

THE SOVIET SYSTEM. September 1931. B. "Upasamhār," *Russiar Chithi*.

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI. January 1932. B. "Mahatma Gandhi," *Prabasi*, Agrahayan 1338.

ASIA'S RESPONSE TO THE CALL OF THE NEW AGE. October 1932. B. *Pārasye*, Chapter II, *Jāpāne-Pārasye*.

REBEL INDIA. January 1933. A review of H. N. Brailsford's *Rebel India*.

ON RUSSIA.<sup>1</sup> June 1934. B. "Upasamhār," *Russiar Chithi*.

COMMUNAL DECISION. August 1936. Reprinted from *An Address*.

INSULT TO MAN'S HUMANITY AND PENAL EXCESS. September 1937. B. "Prachalita Dandaniti," *Prabasi*, Aswin 1344. An address delivered at Santiniketan on "Andamans Prisoners' Day." In this connection, see "The Andamans Prisoners' Strike," a message to a public meeting held at Calcutta on 2 August 1937 in *Hindu*, August 3, 1937.

THE CONGRESS. July 1939. B. "Congress," *Prabasi*, Ashadh 1346.

OTHER TIMES. September, 1939. A. T. "The Changing Age," *Visva-bharati Quarterly*, August-October 1935. B. "Kalantar," *Kalantar*.

ARMAGEDDON. November 1939. B. "Patrālāp" and "Dvitiya Patra," *Prabasi*, Kartik 1346.

<sup>1</sup> The whole series of Tagore's "Letters from Russia" were to have been published in the *Modern Review*. The journal was, however, prevented from doing so by the Government. In this connection, the following extracts from the proceedings of Parliament should be interesting.

"Mr. R. J. Davies asked the Secretary of State for India whether he was aware that the Government of Bengal had given notice to the *Modern Review* of India that an article written by Rabindranath Tagore, entitled "On Russia", which appeared in the *Modern Review* last June, was highly objectionable, and that the editor had been warned that such articles must not be published in future; and, in view of the fact that no objection was taken by the Government of Bengal when this and similar articles were published in book form by this author in 1931, if he would state why this alteration of policy had taken place.

"Mr. Butler, Under-Secretary for India: It is the case that a warning was issued to the editor of the *Modern Review* in respect of an article written by Rabindranath Tagore. This article was taken from a book called "Letters from Russia", which was published in Bengali by a local press in 1931. This book attracted little public attention and consequently no notice of it was taken by Government, but the translation into English of a particular chapter, which was clearly calculated by distortion of the facts to bring the British Administration in India into contempt and disrepute, and its publication in the forefront of a widely read English magazine, put a wholly different complexion on the case." *The Times*, 13 November 1934.

It is amusing to note that a translation of the same "letter", under the caption "The Soviet System", appeared in the same journal in September 1931 when the Government took no notice of it. Further, these letters, prior to their publication in book form in Bengali, were serially published in a most influential and widely circulated Bengali journal, *Prabasi*, when again no notice was taken of them by the Government.

THE CRISIS. December 1939. B. "Amader Abastha," *Prabasi*, Agrahayan, 1346.

INDIA'S PROBLEM. January 1940. A. T. "The Small and the Great," December 1917 and "The Great and The Small," *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, May-July 1936. B. "Chhoto O Bado," *Kalantar*.

RECOVERY. January 1941. B. "Arogya," *Prabasi*, Magh 1347.

CRISIS IN CIVILISATION. May 1941. B. "Sabhyatar Sankat," *Prabasi*, Jaistha 1348.

THE HISTORY AND IDEALS OF SRINIKETAN. November 1941. B. "Sriniketaner Itihas O Adarsha," *Prabasi*, Bhadra 1346.

### B. VISVA-BHARATI QUARTERLY

A VISION OF INDIA'S HISTORY. April 1923. A. T. "My Interpretation of Indian History," *The Modern Review*, August and September 1913. B. "Bharatvarshe Itihaser Dhara". *Parichay*.

THE WAY TO UNITY. July 1923.

CITY AND VILLAGE.<sup>1</sup> October 1924. Reprinted *City and Village*. Also, in part, as introduction to *Reconstruction and Education in Rural India*, P. C. Lal and "The Wedded Partners" *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 23 November 1929. For a revised version, see "Wealth and Welfare", *The Modern Review*, February 1930.

NOTES AND COMMENTS. October 1924. On International Co-operation.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. January 1925. An address delivered in Japan. Reprinted *Lectures and Addresses*.

THE VOICE OF HUMANITY. April 1925. An address delivered at Milan. Reprinted *Lectures and Addresses*.

NOTES AND COMMENTS. April 1925. An address on Japan to the Indian Community in Japan.

THE SOUL OF THE EAST. April 1925. An address to the Japanese passengers on board S. S. Suwa-Maru.

JUDGMENT. October 1925. Also in *Hindu*, 27 November 1933. "Challenge of Judgment".

RED OLEANDERS: AUTHOR'S INTERPRETATION. October 1925. Reproduced from *Manchester Guardian*, 28 August 1925.

THE RULE OF THE GIANT. July 1926. For an abridged version see "Organisation", *The Modern Review*, January 1930.

NOTES AND COMMENTS. October 1926. Revised version of "Philosophy of Fascism," *Manchester Guardian*, 5 August 1926.

SWAMI SRADDHANANDA. January 1927. B. "Swami Sraddha-nānda", *Prabasi*, Magh 1333.

<sup>1</sup> See Sri M. N. Roy's criticism, "Rabindranath and Private Property," and Sri Asoke Chatterjee's reply, in *Welfare*, February 1925.

NOTES AND COMMENTS. April 1927. Reproduced from *Atlantic Monthly*.

NOTES AND COMMENTS. July 1927. Presidential Address, International Co-operators' Day, Albert Hall, Calcutta, 2 July 1927. Also in *Bengal Cooperative Journal*, July-September 1927. "The Co-operative Principle".<sup>1</sup> B. "Bharatvarshe Samavayer Visishtha," *Bhandar*, Sravan 1334.

NOTES AND COMMENTS. October 1928. Reprinted *City and Village* 1. B. *Palli-Prakriti*.

INDIA AND EUROPE. April-July 1929. Reprinted *Rabindranath Tagore's Visit to Canada*, Visvabharati Bulletin 14. For another version, see "Europe, Asia and Africa", *The Modern Review*, December 1928.

INTERNATIONAL GOODWILL. vol. viii, part 3, 1930-31. Speech at a reception arranged by the All People's Association, London, on 8 January 1931.

MEETING OF THE EAST AND WEST. vol. viii, part 3, 1930-31. Speech at a reception held under the auspices of the Discussion Guild and the India Society of America in New York on 1 December 1930. See remarks on "Gandhiji's Spiritual Power".

THE CHANGING AGE. August-October 1935. B. "Kalantar". *Kalantar*. A. T. "Other Times" *The Modern Review*, September 1939.

THE GREAT AND THE SMALL. May-July 1936. A. T. *The Modern Review*, December 1917, "The Small and the Great" and January 1940, "India's Problem". B. "Chhoto O Bado", *Kalantar*.

MAHATMA GANDHI. November 1937-January 1938. B. "Mahatma Gandhi", *Prabasi* Agrahayan 1344.

CIVILISATION AND PROGRESS. February-April 1941. Reproduced from *Talks in China*.

GREATER INDIA. May-July 1943. B. "Brihattara Bharat", *Kalantar*.

HINDU MUSSALMAN. August-October 1943. B. "Hindu Mussalman", *Kalantar*.

GANDHI THE MAN. August-October 1944. Reproduced from the *Sunday Statesman*, 13 February 1938.

### 3. LETTERS TO EDITORS, OPEN LETTERS, STATEMENTS, INTERVIEWS, SHORT ADDRESSES, SUMMARIES OF SPEECHES ETC.

THE INTERNMENT AND MRS. BESANT: SIR RABINDRANATH, TAGORE'S LETTER. *Bengalee*, 7 September 1917. To a friend in England, on some aspects of the present political situation in India, especially the question of internment.

<sup>1</sup> In this connection see Rabindranath Tagore's "Truth of Co-operation," in *Foreign Affairs*, 1928: reproduced in *Indian National Herald*, Bombay, 27 May 1928.

TAGORE TO GANDHI. *Indian Daily News*, 16 April 1919. Reprinted *Young India 1919-1922* (Ganesan,) vol. iii, pp. 1265-67. An open letter on Passive Resistance.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S LETTER TO THE VICEROY.<sup>1</sup> *The Modern Review*, July 1919, in "Notes", p. 105; *Statesman*, 2 June 1919. The letter resigning his Knighthood.

LETTERS TO ROMAIN ROLLAND. *The Modern Review*, July 1919. In reply to Rolland's request to sign a "Declaration of Independence of Spirit". Reprinted *Rolland and Tagore* (Visva-Bharati). "Notes", p. ii.

TAGORE IN SEARCH OF SPIRITUAL FAITH. *New York Herald*, 1 November 1920. An interview.

TAGORE, IN U. S., TELLS OF BRITISH CRIMES IN INDIA. *New York Call*, 2 November 1920. An interview on the Non-co-operation movement.

HINDU POET SAYS AMERICANS HAVE WRONG IDEA OF INDIA FROM KIPLING. *Post Express*, Rochester, New York, 11 November 1920. An interview. See remarks on Mahatma Gandhi.

ON CONSTRUCTIVE WORK. *The Modern Review*, March 1921. A letter.

ON BRITISH MENTALITY IN RELATION TO INDIA. *The Modern Review*, April 1921. A letter to C. F. Andrews. See *Letters from Abroad* pp. 21-24.

MEETING OF THE EAST AND WEST. *Morning Post*, London 9 April 1921. Summary of an address to Indian Students' Union and Hostel, Keppel Street.

PUBLIC SPIRIT IN INDIA. *Servant*, Calcutta, 19-23 August 1921. A discourse before the Comité National D'Etudes Sociales Et Politiques held in Paris on 25 April 1921.

<sup>1</sup> For a message decrying the proposal to erect a Jalianwallah Bagh "memorial of anger," read by C. F. Andrews at a meeting held in celebration of the National Week, in Bombay on 13 April 1920 under the presidency of Mr. M. A. Jinnah, see *Young India, 1919-1922* vol. i. (Ganesan) pp. 109-112 ....

"What most concerns us is to know that the moral degradation not only pursues the people inflicting indignities upon the helpless, but also their victims... We shall refuse to be afraid and to own moral defeat by cherishing in our hearts foul dreams of retaliation. . . When brother spills the blood of his brother and exults in his sin, giving it a high-sounding name; when he tries to keep the blood-stains fresh on the soil as a memorial of his anger, then God in shame conceals it under His green grass and sweet purity of His flowers. We who have witnessed the wholesale slaughter of the innocent in our neighbourhood, let us accept God's own office and cover the blood-stains of iniquity with our prayer: *Rudra! yat te dakshinam mukham tena mam pāhi nityam*—'With Thy graciousness, O Terrible, forever save us'. . . Let us bequeath to the generations to come memorials of that only which we can revere,—let us be grateful to our forefathers, who have left us the image of Buddha, who conquered self, preached forgiveness, and spread his love far and wide in time and space."

LETTERS FROM RABINDRANATH TAGORE.<sup>1</sup> *The Modern Review*, May 1921. To C. F. Andrews, on non-co-operation. Reprinted *Letters from Abroad*. pp. 72-85. See also "Letters". "Letters from Abroad", *The Modern Review*, 1921-22. Reprinted *Letters from Abroad*.

DR. RABINDRANATH : HIS VIEWS ON NON-CO-OPERATION. *Amrita-bazar Patrika*, 26 July 1921. A statement.

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ASIA MUST FIND HER OWN VOICE.<sup>2</sup> *Forward*, Calcutta, 18 July 1924. An interview given after return from Far-eastern tour.

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND KNIGHTHOOD. *The Modern Review* February 1926. A statement.

<sup>1</sup> See Mahatma Gandhi's rejoinder : "The Poet's anxiety," *Young India*, 1 June 1921 ; Reprinted *Young India 1919-22* (Ganesan 1922) vol. ii pp. 608-613. In this connection, see also, "Rabindranather Ekkhan Chithi", *Pravasi*, Jaistha 1928, and Mahatma Gandhi's rejoinder, "English Learning", *Young India*, 1 June 1921, reprinted *Young India 1919-22* (Ganesan, 1922) vol. i. pp. 459-61.

<sup>2</sup> See *Christian Science Monitor*, Boston, 3 October 1924, "Culture to give peace to Asia," Special Correspondent's despatch from Shanghai :

"There is on foot an important movement to establish Asiatic Concord through the common culture of Asiatic Nations. . . . The new movement was born of what is called the oriental disillusionment of occidental culture, as typified in modern history and especially in the Great War. It has been accentuated by the recent Japanese exclusion legislation in the United States, and stimulated by the recent visit to the Far East by Rabindranath Tagore, who preached the doctrine of Idealism opposed to Western Materialism.

"The new feeling is shown in the formation of Asiatic Associations in the principal centres, the first of which is located in Shanghai. . . . At the inauguration, representatives of all Asiatic countries were present.

"Inspiration for the movement is acknowledged to Tagore, whose teachings permeate the issued declarations. . . ."



LEST WE FORGET THE VILLAGE : RIGHT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT IS RIGHT OF SELF-CREATION. *Bengalee*, 12 March 1926. A statement.

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AN INTERVIEW IN TOKYO. *Visvabharati Quarterly*, April-July 1929, pp. 157-59. Reprinted *Visvabharati Bulletin*, 14, p. 44. On the Indian Situation, and *Mother India*.

AN INTERVIEW WITH A CHINESE DELEGATION. *Visvabharati Quarterly*, April-July 1929. 159-63. Reprinted *Visvabharati Bulletin* 14, p. 46.

A LETTER. *Visvabharati Quarterly*, April-July 1929, p. 168. 'In answer to a European lady who had expressed her perplexity at not

<sup>1</sup> See Professor Formichi's rejoinder in the *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1926. Tagore's reply to this ("Dr. Tagore and Fascism") was published in the *Manchester Guardian*, 20 September 1926. For reaction in Italy to Tagore's interviews and letters on Fascism published in the *Manchester Guardian*, see "Fascist Way with Tagore," *Manchester Guardian*, 15 September 1926.

being able to break through the reserve of those in the East with whom she dealt in a spirit of sympathy.'

"MOTHER INDIA." *Manchester Guardian*, 11 October 1927. Letter to the Editor. Also in *Times of India*, 7 October 1927.

MESSAGE TO THE WORLD LEAGUE FOR PEACE. *The Modern Review*, October 1928.

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TAGORE ON INDIA : OPINION OF GOVERNMENTAL MACHINE : AN INTERPRETATION OF GANDHI. *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1930. Also issued as a pamphlet "*The Indian Situation : a message from Rabindranath Tagore*," Friends Service Council, London.

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THIS TIME OF CRISIS. *Statesman*, 6 September 1931. Letter to the Editor. On Communal outrage.

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POET TO POET.<sup>3</sup> *Visvabharati Quarterly*, November 1938. Also in *The Modern Review*, October and November 1938. Issued separately as *Poet to Poet*, Sino-Indian Cultural Society Pamphlet 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Anandamohan Sahay.

<sup>2</sup> For Chiang Kai-Shek's reply to this message, see *Pioneer*, 9 August 1938.

<sup>3</sup> See in this connection *Hindusthan Standard*, 10 January 1939. "Noguchi repeats his fulminations: Unpardonable slur on Rabindranath," being a letter addressed to "Dear Friends of India."

## BENGALI

### I. BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

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RAJA PRAJA. 1908. Contents: Ingraj O Bharatvasi; Rajnitr Dvidha; Apamaner Pratikar; Subicharer Adhikar; Kantharodh; Atyukti; Imperialism; Rajbhakti; Bahurajakata; Path O Patheya; Samasya.

SAMUHA. 1908. Contents: Svadesi Samaj; Svadesi Samaj Prabandher Parisista; Desanayak; Saphalatar Sadupay; Pabna Pradesik Sammilani Upalakshe Abhibhasan; Sadupay.

SVADES. 1908. Contents: Nutan O Puratan; Navavarsa; Desiya Rajya; Prachya O Paschatya Sabhyata; Brahman; Samajbhed; Dharmabodher Dristanta.

KARTAR ICCHAY KARMA. 1917. Reprinted *Kalantar*. E.T. "Thou Shalt Obey", *The Modern Review*, September 1917.

PALLIPRAKRITI. 1928. E.T. *City and Village* I.

SAMAVAYNITI. 1929.

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DESER KAJ. 1932.

KALANTAR. 1937. Contents: Kalantar; Vivechana O Avivechana; Lokahit; Ladairer Mul; Kartar Ichhay Karma; Choto O Bado; Vatayaniker Patra (E.T. "Letters from an Onlooker", *The Modern Review*, July 1919); Sakti-puja; Satyer Ahvan (E. T. "The Call of

Truth", *The Modern Review*, October 1921) ; Samasya (E.T. "The Problem", *The Modern Review*, January 1924) ; Samadhan ; Sudradharma (E. T. "The Sudra Habit", *The Modern Review*, March 1927) ; Brihattara Bharat (E. T. "Greater India", *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, May-July 1943) ; Hindu Mussalman (E. T. "Hindu-Mussalman", *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, August-October 1943) ; Nari.

SRINIKETAN SILPABHANDAR UDBODHAN ABHIBHASAN. 1938.

MAHAJATISADAN. 1939. E. T. included.

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With three exceptions, only those pamphlets, which have not so far been published in any book, are included in this list.

The following novels and dramas should also be read :

## NOVELS

GORA. 1910. E. T. *Gora*, (Macmillan).

GHARE BAIRE. 1916. E. T. *The Home and the World*, (Macmillan).

CHAR ADHYAY. 1934. E. T. "Four Chapters", *Asia*, December 1936, January, February and April 1937.

## DRAMAS

PRAYASCHITTA.<sup>1</sup> 1909. Revised version, PARITRAN, 1929.

ACHALAYATAN. 1912.

MUKTADHARA. 1922. E. T. "The Waterfall", *The Modern Review*, May 1922 ; "Muktadhara", *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, February 1941 and February 1942.

RAKTAKARABI. 1926. E. T. *Red Oleanders* (Macmillan).

KALER YATRA. 1932. For E. T. of "Rathayatra", an earlier version of "Kaler Yatra", see *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, January 1934, "The Car of Time".

Readers of *The Political Thought of Tagore* must have noticed that the author has not confined his attention only to the so-called political writings of Rabindranath ; he has, very properly, drawn upon the poet's essays on educational and social problems of India, and his sermons. It would however be outside the scope of the present bibliography to include a list of these writings ; only a few of them have been noted. Those who are interested in the poet's thoughts on educational and social reconstruction of India should read *Siksha*, vol. i. (1951 B. S. edn.) and vol. ii (in the press), collected papers on education and *Samaj*, collected papers on social

<sup>1</sup> See Ramananda Chatterjee, "Rabindranath Tagore" in the *Visvabharati Quarterly*, Tagore Birthday Number, May-October 1941, for translations of certain portions (Prayaschitta, Act 2, scene II ; Act 3, scene I ; Act 4, scene VII) illustrating the writer's note : "The 'No-Tax' movement adumbrated in his plays *Prayaschitta* and *Paritrán* and the joyful acceptance of sufferings and chains by its hero, Dhananjay Bairagi, a mendicant, embody his idea of what the attitude of leaders and the rank and file should be on such occasions".

questions, a fuller edition of which is in the press, and *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. xii, "Essays" section with appendices and notes. The poet's ideas regarding Internationalism and Universal brotherhood found expression in some of his religious and philosophical discourses, collected in *Dharma* (1909), *Santiniketan* i-xvii (1909-16), *Religion of Man* (1930), *Manuser Dharma* (1933) and *Man* (1937).

## 2. ESSAYS<sup>1</sup>, LETTERS ETC.

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CHINA MARANER VYAVASAY. *Bharati*, Jaistha, 1288. E. T. "The Death Traffic", *The Modern Review*, May 1925.

CHENCHIYE BALA. *Bharati*, Chaitra 1289.

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NATIONAL FUND ' *Bharati*, Kartik 1290.

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SIMANTA PRADES O ASRITA RAJYA. *Sadhana*, Paus 1298.

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SIR LEPPEL GRIFFIN. *Sadhana*, Sravan 1299. Reprinted *Rabindra Rachanavali* vol. x appendix.

GIBRALTAR VARJAN. *Sadhana*, Bhadra 1300.

INGREJ O BHARATVASI. *Sadhna*, Asvin-Kartik 1300. Reprinted *Raja Praja*.

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RAJNITIR DVIDIHA. *Sadhana*, Chaitra 1300. Reprinted *Raja Praja*.

RAJA O PRAJA. *Sadhana*, Sravan 1301. Reprinted *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. x, appendix.

APAMANER PRATIKAR. *Sadhana*, Bhadra 1301. Reprinted *Raja Praja*.

SUBICHARER ADHIKAR. *Sadhana*, Agrahayan 1301. Reprinted *Raja Praja*.

<sup>1</sup> Many of the poet's earlier essays were published anonymously; those included in this list were however attributed to him, during his life-time, by Prof. P. C. Mahalanabis, in *Golden Book of Tagore* (1931) and Sri Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyaya, in *Rabindra-Jivani*, vol. i. 1933.



ALOCHANA. *Sadhana*, Agrahayan 1301—Kartik 1302. Editorial comments on current affairs.

KANTHARODH. *Bharati*, Vaisakh 1305. Reprinted *Raja Praja*.

MUKHUJYE BANAM BARUJYE. *Bharati*, Bhadra 1305. Reprinted *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. x, appendix.

APAR PAKSHOER KATHA. *Bharati*, Asvin 1305. Reprinted *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. x, appendix.

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PRACHYA O PASCHATYA SABHYATAR ADARSA. *Vangadarsan*, Jaistha 1308. Reprinted *Bharatvarsha*, *Svadesh*,

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NAVAVARSHA. *Vangadarsan*, Vaisakh 1309. Reprinted *Bharatvarsha*, *Svades*.

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RASTRANITI O DHARMANITI. *Vangadarsan*, Kartik 1309. Reprinted *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. x, appendix.

RAJKUTUMVA. *Vangadarsan*, Vaisakh 1310. Reprinted *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. x, appendix.

GHUSAGHUSI. *Vangadarsan*, Bhadra 1310. Reprinted *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. x, appendix.

DHARMABODHER DRISTANTA. *Vangadarsan*, Asvin 1310. Reprinted *Svades*.

• VANGA-VIBHAG. *Vangadarsan*, Jaistha 1311. Reprinted *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, vol. x, appendix. For E. T. See "Sir Rabindranath and Politics" by A WELL-WISHER OF THE EMPIRE [Dr. Nalinikanta Bhattacharya] in *Statesman*, 6 October 1917.

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SVADESI SAMAJ. *Vangadarsan*, Bhadra 1311. Reprinted *Atmasakti*, *Samuha*. E. T. "Communal Life in India", *The Modern Review*, June 1913; "Our Svadeshi Samaj", *The Modern Review*, April 1921.

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SAPHALATAR SADUPAY. *Vangadarsan*, Chaitra 1311. Reprinted *Atmasakti*, *Samuha*. E. T. "The Way to Get it done", *The Modern Review*, May 1921.

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DESIYA RAJYA.<sup>2</sup> *Vangadarsan*, Sravan 1312. Reprinted *Atmasakti*, *Svades*.

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<sup>1</sup> Following this address, the poet made an attempt to start an organisation on lines suggested in the paper and drafted a set of rules (reproduced in part by Sri Amal Home in *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 13 September 1941, "Tagore Memorial Special Supplement", p. 38), for the guidance of its members.

<sup>2</sup> In this connection, see "Bharat-Rajanya-Sabha", in *Rabi*, vol. ii, part 4 in which the poet urged the establishment of regional chambers of Princes: reproduced by Sri Amal Home in *Yugantar*, 25 Vaisakh, 1345.

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